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Tory Robert Jenrick slams scheme that freed 8,000 convicts to 'roam our streets'

CRIMINALS OUT FOR CHRISTMAS AFTER EARLY RELEASE

Robert Jenrick blasts jail plan

EXCLUSIVE
BY **MICHAEL KNOWLES**
Home Affairs Editor

MORE than 8,000 criminals were freed to enjoy Christmas at home – thanks to Labour's early release scheme, figures show.

Some 8,269 inmates who had been sentenced to at least two years in jail were let loose between January and June.

This included 139 hardened criminals locked up for more than 14 years.

Custody

Another 329 had been jailed for between 10 and 14 years and 1,761 were handed more than five.

Tories claim that they "would still have been in custody over Christmas 2025 had they served their full sentence".

Robert Jenrick, the Shadow Justice Secretary said instead they were "roaming our streets".

He warned: "Thanks to

TURN TO PAGE 4

'Amandaland's Lucy is funniest thing on TV'
RICHARD AND JUDY PAGES 18 & 19

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TESCO

Every little helps

Singer's Dua tour break

BY **NIKKI ONAFUYE**

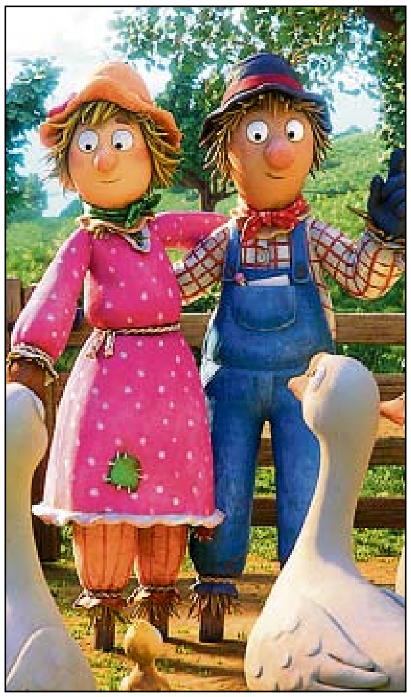
DUA Lipa makes a smart Christmas move – catching some Boxing Day sun instead of freezing back in Blighty.

The pop star, 29, topped up her tan on holiday with fiancé Callum Turner in Mexico, as she unwinds after finishing the last leg of her Radical Optimism Tour in South America.

Callum, 34, also enjoyed the down time after working on his latest film, One Night Only, in which he stars with Brat Pack legend Molly Ringwald. The movie is out next year.

Dua checks her shades as she enjoys the sun

The couple on sun loungers at their resort



The Scarecrows' Wedding was a big TV hit

King is crowning glory of Christmas Day TV

Charles and Scarecrows top ratings chart

BY **MARK JEFFERIES**

THE King's festive speech was the most watched Christmas Day broadcast as the BBC secured nine out of the top 10 programmes on traditional TV.

King Charles's message, calling on communities to pull together in an increasingly divided world, pulled in 5.5million across BBC and ITV.

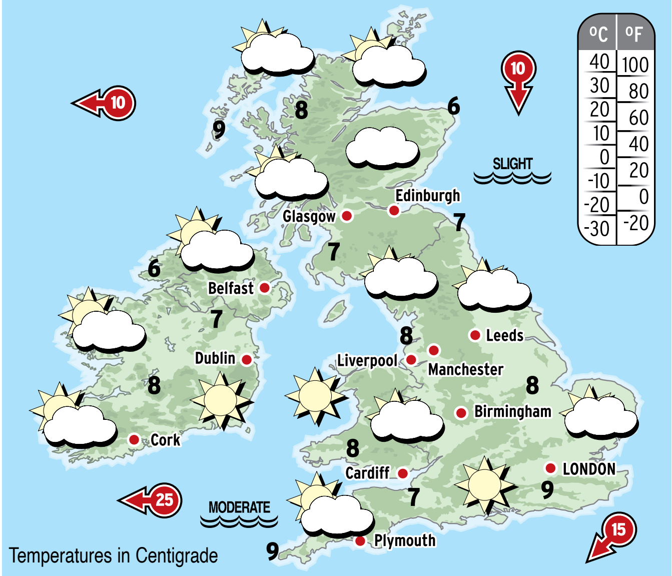
Animation The Scarecrows' Wedding was the other big hit, scoring 4.3m viewers. The adaptation of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's much loved picture book was narrated by Slow Horses star Sophie Okonedo.

However it was noticeable the numbers were well down on last year when the Gavin & Stacey finale attracted an average of 12.3m. It's thought more and more families are moving away from traditional viewing, instead choosing shows on streaming service rivals. The exception to the BBC's Christmas Day dominance was Lee Mack's The 1% Club on ITV, which attracted 2.7m viewers.

Strictly Come Dancing, which saw Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman hosting for the final time, managed 4.2m compared to 4.05m last year.

Kate Phillips, BBC's chief content officer said: "Having nine out of the top 10 shows on Christmas Day is a timely reminder that shared moments really do still matter."

WEATHER FORECAST



Temperatures in Centigrade

Today's summary: Sunny start, cloudy later

North West: Cloudy start, brighter spells later. Gentle breeze, feeling cool throughout. High 8C (46F).

Northern Ireland: Bright start, turning overcast. Breeze picks up, feeling cool throughout the day. High 7C (45F).

Wales: Cloudy with sunny spells later. Breezy and cool throughout the day. High 7C (45F).

Midlands: Cloudy, brightening later. Breezy with a mild feel and strong westerly winds. High 7C (45F).

North East/Yorks: Cloudy skies dominate. Partial clearing later. Breezy with a chill in the air. High 8C (46F).

Scotland: Cloudy skies persist. Brighter spells emerge later. Brisk winds, turning cool. High 7C (45F).

East Anglia: Cloudy, turning mostly cloudy later. Breezy, mild temperatures throughout. High 9C (48F).

London/South East: Bright start, turning overcast by afternoon. Breezy with brisk winds, mild overall. High 9C (48F).

South: Sunny spells, turning cloudy later. Breezy, with mild temperatures throughout the day. High 8C (46F).

South West: Cloudy start, turning sunnier later. Fresh winds, temperatures rising through the day. High 7C (45F).

Channel Isles: Sunny spells, clear skies later. Brisk winds throughout, becoming cooler in the evening. High 7C (45F).

Sea: North Sea: Moderate. Irish Sea: Moderate. Channel: Moderate.

UK OUTLOOK TOMORROW: Expect chilly mornings with sunshine, turning cloudy by afternoon. Winds remain moderate. A dry day overall with temperatures staying cool.

SIX-DAY FORECAST

Temperatures in Centigrade

	SUN			MON			TUE			WED			THU			FRI		
		min	max		min	max		min	max		min	max		min	max		min	max
London	☁	1	8	⛅	4	7	☁	0	8	⛅	1	6	🌨	1	6	🌦	1	6
Belfast	⛅	2	7	⛅	1	5	⛅	1	5	⛅	3	5	🌦	3	6	🌦	4	6
Birmingham	☁	2	7	⛅	3	6	⛅	0	6	⛅	1	5	🌨	2	6	🌨	1	5
Cardiff	⛅	2	7	⛅	3	6	⛅	0	7	⛅	1	6	🌧	2	6	🌦	2	6
Glasgow	⛅	0	6	MIST	0	4	MIST	0	4	⛅	3	6	🌦	2	7	🌨	3	6
Manchester	⛅	2	7	⛅	2	5	⛅	0	6	⛅	1	4	🌧	1	5	🌨	2	5
Newcastle	☁	3	7	⛅	4	5	⛅	1	5	⛅	2	5	🌧	2	5	🌦	2	5
Norwich	☁	4	9	☁	5	8	☁	3	8	🌧	2	6	🌧	2	6	🌧	2	6
Plymouth	⛅	3	8	⛅	3	6	⛅	2	7	⛅	3	6	🌧	4	7	🌦	4	7

Britain yesterday

24 hours to 5pm	SUN (hrs)	RAIN (ins)	TEMP (min)	(max)		SUN (hrs)	RAIN (ins)	TEMP (min)	(max)
Aberdeen	0.0	0.00	3	6	Glasgow	2.1	0.00	4	8
Aberporth	6.8	0.00	3	5	Hull	6.4	0.00	1	8
Alnwick	0.3	0.00	6	8	Ipswich	2.5	0.00	1	5
Belfast	6.3	0.00	2	6	Leeds	4.9	0.00	0	6
Birmingham	5.6	0.00	-1	6	Lincoln	6.4	0.00	0	7
B'mouth	0.0	0.00	-1	6	London	1.0	0.00	3	6
Bristol	0.3	0.00	2	5	Manchester	6.2	0.00	2	7
Cardiff	1.6	0.00	3	5	Oxford	4.0	0.00	2	5
Durham	1.8	0.00	2	7	S'hampton	0.7	0.00	2	6
Edinburgh	0.0	0.00	5	7	St Andrews	0.0	0.00	6	8

Moon, sun and tides

MOON rises: 11.28am, sets: -
SUN rises London: 8.06am, sets: 3.57pm
Manchester rises: 8.25am, sets: 3.55pm

◐ **Full Moon**
03 January

HIGH TIDE

London B'ge	(5.58am), (6.33pm)
Liverpool	(3.25am), (3.48pm)
Greenock	(4.49am), (4.59pm)
Dover	(3.12am), (3.38pm)

Britain Extremes:
(24 hours to 2pm yesterday)

Warmest: Bridlington 8C (46F)
Coldest: Aviemore -7C (19F)
Wettest: St. Mary's 0.14in.
Sunniest: Aberporth 6.8hr.

Lighting-up times

Belfast	4.03pm-8.46am	Glasgow	3.48pm-8.47am
Birmingham	3.59pm-8.18am	London	3.57pm-8.06am
Bristol	4.07pm-8.15am	Manchester	3.55pm-8.25am
		Newcastle	3.43pm-8.31am

Europe forecast

Today			Tomorrow		
Amsterdam	Cloudy	6C/43F	Amsterdam	Sunny	4C/39F
Brussels	Sunny	5C/41F	Brussels	Fair	4C/39F
Dublin	Fair	9C/48F	Dublin	Cloudy	8C/46F
Frankfurt	Sunny	5C/41F	Frankfurt	Sunny	4C/39F
Geneva	Sunny	5C/41F	Geneva	Sunny	4C/39F
Lisbon	Showers	10C/50F	Lisbon	Fair	14C/57F
Madrid	Fair	11C/52F	Madrid	Rain	11C/52F
Paris	Sunny	5C/41F	Paris	Fair	4C/39F
Rome	Sunny	15C/59F	Rome	Sunny	14C/57F

Around the world yesterday

		C	F			C	F			C	F
Amsterdam	Sunny	0	32	Hong Kong	Cloudy	14	57	New York	Sunny	7	45
Athens	Cloudy	14	57	Istanbul	Cloudy	9	48	Nice	Fair	16	61
Barcelona	Shwrs	13	55	Jersey	Fair	5	41	Nicosia	Shwrs	16	61
Berlin	Sunny	-2	28	Larnaca	Fair	21	70	Perth	Shwrs	26	79
Budapest	Fair	5	41	Las Palmas	Sunny	21	70	Prague	Sunny	-2	28
Cairo	Sunny	20	68	Los Angeles	Shwrs	19	66	Singapore	Fair	30	86
Cape Town	Sunny	29	84	Luxor	Sunny	20	68	Stockholm	Sunny	4	39
Casablanca	Thndr	16	61	Malaga	Fair	14	57	Sydney	Cloudy	16	61
Corfu	Cloudy	16	61	Mallorca	Shwrs	11	52	Tel Aviv	Sunny	20	68
Dublin	Fair	6	43	Malta	Fair	18	64	Tenerife	Sunny	23	73
Dubrovnik	Sunny	13	55	Melbourne	Cloudy	17	63	Toronto	Cloudy	-1	30
Faro	Fair	11	52	Miami	Sunny	27	81	Tunis	Fair	17	63
Florence	Sunny	13	55	Moscow	Snow	0	32	Venice	Sunny	8	46
Gibraltar	Fair	14	57	Nairobi	Sunny	23	73	Vienna	Fair	0	32
Guernsey	Cloudy	6	43	New Delhi	Sunny	19	66	Warsaw	Cloudy	-4	25

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LABOUR'S EARLY

COMMENT

CHRIS PHILP
Shadow Home Secretary

'TWAS the week before Christmas, when all through the shop, not a security guard was stirring, not even a cop.

Shops are busiest, staff are stretched and margins are thinnest. This is when criminals hit hardest.

Shoplifting is at new heights, with more than half-a-million offences recorded in the past year alone. Robberies against businesses have surged, up 55% in 12 months.

Crowds, cash and chaos create opportunity, and criminals exploit all three. This Christmas, everything gets nicked, St Nick included, except the criminals.

Labour is making that pressure worse. Under Labour's early-release regime, prison sentences no longer mean what they say on the tin.

Thousands of offenders have been waved out early. If court decisions had been honoured, every one would still be behind bars this Christmas.

Labour also plan to abolish prison sentences under a year - meaning shoplifters will effectively never go to prison. This will mean there is no deterrent and shoplifting will surge.

While retailers spend December worrying about shutters, security tags and abuse, Labour's answer has been to release thousands of offenders back into the mix.

Recruiting

Shop staff and small businesses are left to absorb the risk, while offenders face fewer consequences.

The next Conservative government will act. Fully funded through our £47billion Savings Plan, with £800million a year for policing, we will rebuild the front line by recruiting 10,000 new officers.

They will be sent where they are needed most through year-round hotspot policing in 2,000 high-crime neighbourhoods. That means 8.3m extra patrol hours every year and tens of thousands of offences stopped before they happen.

We will use tech properly. Live facial recognition will be routinely deployed in crime hotspots.

Stop and search will be tripled to take knives and weapons off streets.

Non-hate crime incidents will be scrapped to free up more than 60,000 police hours.

And the Home Secretary will be given the authority to set binding priorities across all forces, ending the drift and inconsistency that lets criminals exploit the gaps.

Taken together, this is a reset. Clear priorities, visible policing, real consequences, at Christmas and all-year round.

Kidnapper Daniel Dowling-Brooks, centre, celebrates his early release from a Kent jail last year

8,269 inmates serving two years or more set free Jan-June

1,761 prisoners sentenced to more than five years let loose

139 hardened criminals locked up for over 14 years were released

FROM PAGE ONE

Labour, thousands of criminals will be enjoying themselves this Christmas. More than 8,000 prisoners who would have been serving their prison sentences this Christmas will be roaming our streets."

Turning his fire on Justice Secretary David Lammy, Mr Jenrick continued: "Calamity Lammy and Labour are overseeing record levels of shoplifting and robberies targeting businesses. Basic items like butter and chocolate are now being security tagged.

"While families work hard to afford presents in the face of Labour's tax hikes, criminals are being allowed to run riot on the streets and help themselves to whatever they want."

Shoplifting has surged to record levels, with 530,000 offences recorded in the 12 months to June – a rise of 13% compared with the previous year.

Robberies that target businesses have also soared, to some 18,534 offences – a 55% increase over the same period.

Shelved

And 824 shoplifting investigations were shut down every day last year before a suspect was even identified, Home Office figures show.

Some 300,820 cases were shelved before a thief was found and 90,937 investigations were ended due to a lack of evidence. Just 107,090

CORRECTIONS AND COMPLAINTS

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‘Thousands of criminals will be enjoying themselves’

EXPRESS VOTE

Should the government scrap the early release of prisoners?

YES: 0901 133 4440 NO: 0901 133 4441

Yes text DXYES to 63333 No text DXNO to 63333

(Calls cost 50p plus network access charge; texts cost 50p plus standard network rate)

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shoplifting offences resulted in a charge in the year to June.

Illustrating the crisis of confidence engulfing the criminal justice system, more than 50,000 people refused to support the prosecution of shoplifters.

Under Labour’s release scheme, nearly 40,000 prisoners have been let out early. More than 25,000 benefited from “conditional release”, while almost 11,000 were allowed to stay at home under a curfew.

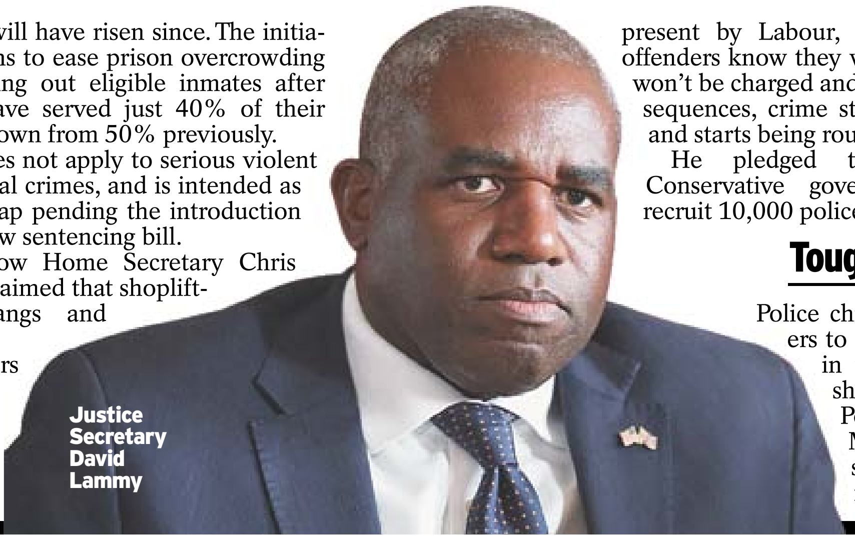
Some 4,358 were let out early in June, the second highest total since the scheme was set up.

A total of 8,269 inmates sentenced to at least two years in jail had been released early by June this year and, since the scheme is continuing, that figure will have risen since. The initiative aims to ease prison overcrowding by letting out eligible inmates after they have served just 40% of their term, down from 50% previously.

It does not apply to serious violent or sexual crimes, and is intended as a stopgap pending the introduction of a new sentencing bill.

Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp claimed that shoplifters, gangs and repeat offenders were being handed an early present by Labour, adding: “When offenders know they won’t be caught, won’t be charged and won’t face consequences, crime stops being risky and starts being routine.”

He pledged that a future Conservative government would recruit 10,000 police officers.



Justice Secretary David Lammy

Tough

Police chiefs want retailers to help them more in the war against shop theft. Met Police boss Sir Mark Rowley said some stores refuse to pass on images of thieves. Others will not give staff time off to provide statements or attend court.

Sir Mark said: “If they’re not prepared to roll up their sleeves as corporate victims, it’s going to be tough.”

Last night one government source said: “This is shameless hypocrisy from the Conservative Party that released more than 10,000 prisoners before the general election and left our prisons on the brink of collapse after 14 years of austerity.

“If Labour had not acted, prisons would have overflowed and we would have faced a breakdown in law and order.” The Ministry of Justice was approached for comment.

OPINION: PAGE 14

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NO LET UP IN PRESSURE

Starmer is the 'worst' PM... according to his own voters

BY **JONATHAN WALKER** Whitehall Editor

SIR KEIR Starmer has been branded Labour's worst-ever Prime Minister – by his own voters.

A poll of those who backed Labour last year found they considered him its least successful PM. In a further humiliation more than a third of Labour voters said the party's chance of winning the next general election would be improved if Sir Keir quit and let someone else take over.

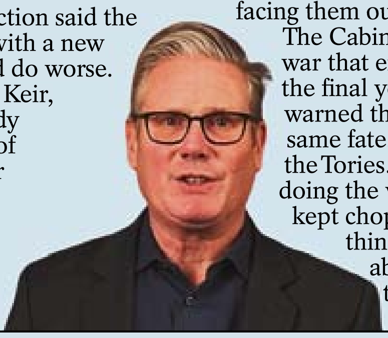
The survey, conducted by JL Partners for the Independent, comes as Sir Keir prepares for a tough 2026. Elections in May may see Labour lose ground in both the Welsh and Scottish parliaments as well as in English councils.

Ministers are gearing up for fresh rows with backbenchers over efforts to curb sickness benefits, plans to limit jury trials and a controversial digital ID card scheme.

The poll found 38% of people who voted Labour in the 2024 general election said the party would be more popular with a new leader, while 13% said it would do worse.

As to who should replace Sir Keir, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham was backed by 19% of Labour supporters, with former Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner the choice of one in 10.

Deputy party leader Lucy Powell is the preferred choice of 9%, with Health Secretary Wes Streeting and Energy Secretary Ed Miliband both supported by 6%.



Mr Burnham is reportedly keen to return to Westminster as an MP, which he would need to do in order to stand for the leadership.

The second most unpopular Labour PM among the party's supporters was Sir Tony Blair, whose reputation never recovered after the controversial decision to invade Iraq in 2003.

However, Sir Keir has received backing from Local Government Secretary Steve Reed, who urged party colleagues to rally around the Premier. In a tacit admission of divisions within Labour ranks, Mr Reed said: "The British people will never forgive us if we fall inwards on each other rather than focusing on the crisis that is facing them out there on the streets."

The Cabinet minister highlighted the civil war that engulfed the Tory Party during the final years of its last government and warned that Labour must not suffer the same fate. He added: "We cannot be like the Tories. It wasn't just that they were doing the wrong things for 14 years, they kept chopping and changing from one thing to another and there was absolutely no stability in the country."

ANALYSIS

JONATHAN WALKER

Whitehall Editor

KEIR Starmer is heading for a very unhappy new year, because he knows 2026 could be when he leaves 10 Downing Street for good.

Labour voters at the last election think he is the party's worst PM. Meanwhile, Labour backbenchers just don't believe he can win again and think their best chance of holding on to their seats is to remove him. And they don't like him.

The PM keeps introducing unpopular policies, which most of his MPs loyally support – such as cutting winter fuel payments, limiting access to disability benefits and landing family farms with massive inheritance tax bills.

Then he does a U-turn, making everyone who defended it look stupid. You can understand why potential replacements are on manoeuvres.

Backbenchers are understandably worried by opinion polls that show them not just second, behind Reform, but often in third place behind the Tories. Labour may be headed for fourth, with the Greens threatening to overtake them.

It will be elections in May that determine if Labour MPs really start to panic. The party may be battered in Wales and Scotland, and suffer losses in English councils. Sir Keir faces an uncertain future but may cause huge damage to the UK before he goes. First, his government is pressing ahead with policies that threaten freedoms, such as limiting the right to a trial by jury and introducing compulsory digital ID cards.

Second, Sir Keir is determined to protect his Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, even though she has repeatedly shown she is not up to the job. She says she wants to grow the economy but has repeatedly imposed extra taxes and red tape.

Finally, he has abandoned any attempt to pretend he supports Brexit. In his desperation to stem the flow of support from Labour to the Lib Dems and the Greens he is committing himself to ever-closer union with Brussels.

It has been said every political career ends in failure, but it usually takes longer than this.

Sir Keir won an election landslide less than 18 months ago, but his stint as PM appears to be heading towards an end. The danger is that he takes the country down with him.

Nigel Farage at a hunt in Chiddingstone, Kent, yesterday

TUC chief: Labour's cost

BY **JONATHAN WALKER**

KEIR Starmer is leading Labour to disaster and opening the door for Nigel Farage to become Prime Minister, a top union boss has warned.

TUC general secretary Paul Nowak said Labour's failure to end the cost-of-living crisis is fuelling a surge in support for Reform UK.

Its leader, Mr Farage attended a Boxing Day Hunt in Chiddingstone, Kent, which could be one of the last to take place, as Labour presses ahead with plans to ban trail hunting despite opposition.

Mr Nowak said: "The cost-of-living crisis might not be in the headlines any more but for too many people change still feels like a slogan and the thing they want to see most of all now is their living standards improving."

The Left-wing union boss urged Sir Keir to provide help for struggling

Quit ECHR, it cannot be

BY **AARON NEWBURY**

BRITAIN should leave the European Convention on Human Rights because there are "no conceivable reforms" that would fix its fundamental flaws, a former Cabinet minister has warned.

Lord Lilley, who served under Margaret Thatcher and John Major, said the ECHR grants unelected judges the "essentially political tasks" of creating new laws and instructing parliament on how to balance different rights, inevitably leading to politicising the judiciary.

His damning assessment comes as calls grow for the UK to withdraw from the convention over concerns that it undermines British sovereignty and prevents the elected government from controlling the country's borders.

The Tory peer said the only solution is to return to the traditional British position where "no law can be made without debate, amendment and approval of parliament accountable to voters".

He added: "The role of the courts is to apply those laws impartially.

"Other Commonwealth dominions have retained that process and upheld the highest standards of freedom and human rights without an international court telling them what to do." Lord Lilley said that former prime ministers Clement Attlee and Winston Churchill "rightly refused to give the ECHR jurisdiction in the UK because they recognised that it would turn our constitution upside down".

He added that it was not until Labour PM Harold Wilson that Britain was subordinated to the convention "without debate". Lord Lilley also said it was another Labour premier, Tony Blair, who allowed UK courts to apply European provisions directly through the Human Rights Act 1998. The peer's intervention comes as frustration mounts on the right. Both the Tories and Reform UK are pledging to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights should either form a government.

Lord Lilley insists exit is only option

Fred de Fossard, director of strategy for the Prosperity Institute, said: "If the ECHR wants to stop countries from leaving, it should instruct its judges to allow member states to control their own borders. This is at the heart of the dispute between nation states and international courts.

"Countries must have the ability to control their borders in the interests of their people.

"No court should sit above Britain's democratically elected parliament. And, in the interests of democratic accountability and national sovereignty, Britain should leave the ECHR."

Calls for changes to the convention have echoed across Europe this year, with nine countries writing an open letter in June 2025 calling for a "new and open-minded conversation" about how the convention is interpreted. There

# of living failure will let Farage into Downing Street

families to end what he called "the rise of the bitter and nasty politics of the Right".

He spoke out as a survey of more than 2,000 adults revealed an "affordability crisis", with one in five saying they are skipping meals every day or most days, one in three cutting back on heating and four in five saying their financial circumstances are either stagnant or getting worse.

Reform UK Deputy Leader Richard Tice said: "It's no wonder that even the trade unions are growing weary of this Labour government, which got elected last year with a promise to get a grip on the cost of living.

"Unlike Labour, we will reduce people's energy bills by scrapping Net Stupid Zero and we will also cut the huge swathes of unnecessary regulations that further increase the cost of living."

Paul Nowak wants action from Labour

Inflation is at 3.2%, significantly higher than the 2% target. Energy bills are up, and the price of food and drink rose by 4.2% over 12 months – with retailers warning that increases to business rates will push costs even higher.

Mr Nowak said the government needs to give people hope that things will change next year, or lose further ground to Reform.

He said that "the government needs to be bolder about what it is doing to improve workers' lives", because economic insecurity is draining people's faith that mainstream politics can deliver change. He added: "2026 must be the year we start turning economic security into a lived reality."

Conservative peer wants Reform UK to join Lords

BY **JESSICA COATES**

A TORY peer wants Sir Keir Starmer to give Reform UK a voice in the House of Lords.

In August, Reform leader Nigel Farage wrote to the PM, calling for his party to be granted life peerages.

Conservative House of Lords leader Lord True said Reform winning seats in the Commons meant their view should be heard in the upper chamber as well.

He said: "The beauty of this house is its complete freedom, so any person here that wants to put down an amendment, that amendment must be heard.

Refresh

"Having someone from a party represented in the House of Commons, to take a detailed part in examination and to put forward that party's point of view, is a sensible principle."

Lord True said he had also called for more Labour peers in the House of Lords under Conservative prime ministers Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss.

He told the Daily Telegraph: "Every party needs a refresh in the chamber, particularly a chamber where the average age is 70.

"You must have new people coming in."

Former Tory life peer Malcolm Offord defected to Reform this month.

reformed says top Tory

have been growing concerns over the "weaponisation of irregular migration" by Belarus and Russia, both of which have been accused of aiding the movement of migrants into EU countries.

A political declaration is expected to be negotiated by the 46 signatories by May, presumably to encourage the Strasbourg court's judges to grant national governments more latitude.

However, critics argue that the convention is fundamentally broken and cannot be reformed. They point to repeated court rulings that blocked deportations and tied up government immigration policy.

But Ian Bond, of the Centre for European Reform, dismissed British concerns as overblown.

He said "no current European government is threatening to withdraw" from the convention, and suggested it would be "wrong to say that there are mounting worries" about signatories leaving.

Mr Bond claimed that for the UK this is "essentially a fuss over nothing" and insisted that even without reforms "it would make almost no difference to the UK".

He said: "In 45 years, the European Court of Human Rights has only ruled against the UK government 13 times on deportation cases and only four of those were based on the right to a family life – not what one might think from UK media reporting on the ECHR.

"It's important to report these things accurately and not give a misleading impression that there is a problem when there isn't. Like any international agreement, the ECHR should be reviewed from time to time – and it has been.

"The main points of the convention – including on the right to respect for family and private life and the prohibition on torture and inhuman or degrading treatment – have stood the test of time well and protect all of us."

Mr Bond insisted that few, if any, states wanted to join Belarus, which has never been a signatory, or Russia, which was expelled from the Council of Europe and also from the convention after its invasion of Ukraine, as European countries outside the ECHR.

But the government has ruled out withdrawing from convention.

A spokesperson said: "We have been clear that the UK will remain a member of the European Convention on Human Rights as we do not need to withdraw to deliver meaningful reform."

Earlier this week, Sir Keir Starmer's equalities chief Mary-Ann Stephenson caused a backlash after saying the UK must "have a recognition" that "the demonisation of migrants" is making the arrivals' lives difficult.

OPINION: PAGE 14

TO READ ALL THE BEST POLITICAL STORIES OF THE DAY GO TO EXPRESS.CO.UK/POLITICS ▶

Another rollercoaster

SATURDAY'S BIG READ

EMILY FERGUSON

Royal Editor

King at Auschwitz, top left; with Canada's First Nations chief Cindy Woodhouse, top right. Meeting veteran on VE Day, above; left, George and Catherine chat to veterans; right, William in Brazil

IT was supposed to be a year of consolidation after the brutal events of 2024. Starting this year as he meant to go on, the King did not take respite in January as his late mother Queen Elizabeth II used to.

Instead the 77-year-old threw himself into his official duties, becoming the first reigning monarch to visit Auschwitz concentration camp as he joined commemorations marking the 80th anniversary of its liberation.

Palace aides had confirmed the King would be resuming a normal schedule of engagements this year despite his ongoing cancer treatment, while the Princess of Wales announced she was in remission just days into the new year.

There followed a busy year as Charles travelled all over the country meeting the public, as well as hosting three inbound state visits at Windsor Castle.

In fact, the King clocked up more engagements than any other senior royal this year, an impressive 532 over the past 12 months – 50 more than Princess Anne, who usually tops the list of the hardest-working members of the Firm.

"He has certainly not let the grass grow under his feet," says Joe Little, managing editor of Majesty magazine.

"That in itself is a good sign that he feels able to do all these things."

'His dedication to duty means he just gets on with it...he won't let us lighten his schedule'

The Royal Family appeared to be back on their feet following a tumultuous 2024, described as the King's "annus horriblis".

The Firm had faced the cancer diagnoses of both the monarch and Princess Catherine, Anne's admission to intensive care following a head injury, and the tragic sudden death of Thomas Kingston, husband of Lady Gabriella, daughter of Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.

But this year was to be different, and the King's brief admission to hospital in March was described by sources as a mere "bump in the road".

Just days later he was undertaking a royal tour to Italy with wife Camilla, which included working through their 20th wedding anniversary.

They then embarked on a whirlwind trip to Canada, travelling some 3,350 miles for a 20-hour trip. An impressive feat for a man in his late 70s undergoing cancer treatment.

Sources said: "His dedication to duty means he just gets on with it. He won't let us lighten his schedule."

The Royal Family put on a united front marking the year's key events, such as the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

But there was work to be done closer to home, too, in relation to the King's younger brother, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor.

Fresh claims over Andrew's association with the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein began to overshadow the important work of senior royals.

After the 65-year-old announced he would stop using his Duke of York title, the King stepped in to formally strip him of his birthright to be a prince.

This effectively banished Andrew from the monarchy and saw him finally surrender his lease at Royal Lodge, the 30-room mansion in Windsor where he has lived for more than 20 years and paid only a "peppercorn rent".

Mr Little believes that the King was a little slow in his response, especially as the full announcement came just days before the Prince of Wales's trip to Brazil for Earthshot, his most important week of the year.

The expert says the delay was due to Charles's compassion – like his late mother Queen Elizabeth, he finds confrontation difficult.

But the trouble is not over yet, according to Phil Dampier, who has more than 40 years experience as a royal journalist.

He says it is "a problem that's going to spill over into the new year".

Mr Little agrees, adding: "Andrew will continue to come back and be a nagging pain from time to time.

"It'll be a long time before it can be put to bed, if ever. It has been tidied up a lot but it's never going to be totally resolved." One event that will be of intense interest next year will be Andrew's move to a farmhouse on the Sandringham estate.

Sources have confirmed a newspaper report earlier in the month that the former prince's new home will be Marsh Farm, a modest, rundown property that once served as a working farm.

"The King is happy for Andrew to move here as it's a long way [seven miles] from the main house," a royal insider said. But the property won't be habitable for some time as it requires extensive renovations.

One source said: "Six months of works are

year for Royal Family

Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor with his brother the King at the funeral service for the Duchess of Kent in September

needed before Andrew can move in, and he's strongly resisting plans to live in a temporary property until the renovations are complete – not least because the suggested property is a fraction of the size of Royal Lodge."

Frustratingly, there is little the King can do to expedite the move.

Andrew is legally entitled to stay at the lavish mansion for another 10 months, as he gave a year's notice on the property on October 30 – the day it was announced he had lost his titles.

Buckingham Palace has suggested he will be out in the first few months of the new year, due to the complexities of terminating the lease, with sources insisting that the move will happen "as soon as possible and practicable".

However, those close to Andrew are adamant that he will "string it out" and hold on to Royal Lodge for as long as he can.

"He never wanted to leave so he's going to do all he can to stay for as long as possible," one says. The source does not expect him to stay in Sandringham full-time, saying he will spend much of his time abroad due to his business contacts in the Middle East.

Mr Dampier agrees that Andrew is unlikely to move out quickly. He says: "The reality is that he will drag it out as long as possible because he doesn't actually want to leave.

"I think it's quite likely he will be there for another six months.

"He's not in any rush to leave because he didn't want to leave in the first place."

Andrew's ex-wife Sarah Ferguson, who has lived with him at Royal Lodge for nearly two decades despite their divorce in 1996, is another worry.

It is unclear where Fergie will go, though she is understood to have a number of options, including moving into the granny annex at the Cotswolds home of her daughter, Princess Beatrice.

Having also lost her title and with her publishing deals drying up, there are fears she could decide to sell her story to fill the coffers.

"She will try to reinvent herself for the umpteenth time and forge on," Mr Dampier says. "Only time will tell whether it's too late for that, but she will certainly try."

Asked whether he thinks a tell-all memoir is on the cards, he says: "If she was backed into a corner she would. She has done it before and certainly knows a lot of intimate secrets about the Royal Family.

"That's part of the reason that the King, in the last few years, has tried to keep her on the inside."

But there have been some bright spots for the royals in 2025.

Two weeks ago the King shared "good news" about his cancer battle, telling the nation that his treatment can be reduced in the new year, and the Princess of Wales was back to undertaking regular engagements.

Young Prince George is being gradually introduced to royal duties, chatting to D-Day veterans in May, joining his mother at the poignant Festival of Remembrance in November and volunteering at a homeless charity with his father just weeks ago.

The 12-year-old appears to be taking on the extra responsibility with ease, and seems unfazed by the future that awaits him.

Next year we will find out which school he will be attending, with William and Catherine undecided between their respective alma maters of Eton and Marlborough College.

Even Prince Harry appeared to calm down this year, despite giving an ill-advised interview after he lost his long-standing security battle in May when he blamed the outcome on a "good old-fashioned establishment stitch-up".

'Andrew never wanted to leave Royal Lodge so he will do all he can to stay there as long as possible'

Now he is awaiting a review into his UK security arrangements, after sending a personal plea to the Home Secretary.

Next year promises to be another busy year for the Firm, with planned trips to Washington, India, and Antigua and Barbuda in the Caribbean.

The Prince and Princess of Wales are understood to be planning their first official trip abroad since their disastrous 2022 Caribbean tour, though this is expected to be a short trip within a few hours' travel from the UK.

The King and his heir will be grateful that the Andrew situation has been dealt with and a meaningful distance has been placed between the disgraced former prince and the rest of the family.

"It's been another rollercoaster year," says Mr Little.

"But 2025 is ending on a very positive note with the improvement in the health of the King.

"And also the fact that the Princess of Wales is much more visible and doing stuff and looking well herself.

"That's a great end to 2025 and, hopefully, that will continue well into 2026.

"The King's almost annus horribilis ends on an optimistic note."

It can only be hoped that the new year tends more to the mirabilis.

Equal pay campaigns see women get £1bn

WOMEN workers have won more than £1billion this year after equal pay campaigns by a leading trade union.

The GMB said hundreds of thousands of women working in council jobs such as care, cleaning and catering are graded lower or have worse terms than male-dominated roles such as refuse collection.

Rhea Wolfson, GMB's head of industrial relations, said: "Fifty years on from the Equal Pay Act, it should be a source of national shame we have to make these claims. Employers need to take note in 2026 – wherever GMB sees women being underpaid compared to men, we are coming for you."

New road pricing to cost us £189m over Christmas

BY **JONATHAN WALKER**
Whitehall Editor

MILLIONS of people jumped in the car to reunite with loved ones over the Christmas break.

But the festive drive is set to become a major money spinner for the Treasury in years to come, thanks to Labour's road-pricing plan.

The government's pay-per-mile scheme is set to cost motorists £189million over future Christmas holidays, analysis shows.

It follows Chancellor Rachel Reeves's announcement of a new per-mile charge for electric and plug-in hybrid cars, coming into force from April 2028.

At the same time, the government plans to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030, ensuring increasing numbers of motorists will pay the fee.

According to Kwik Fit, UK drivers travel a collective 6.3 billion miles over the Christmas period, equivalent to 169 miles each.

This suggests charges of 3p per mile to be introduced by the government will add up to a £189million festive bonanza for Treasury coffers at Christmas in future years.

Conservatives said the impact would be felt most by working people who rely on their cars to see family, juggle childcare, or travel long distances during the holidays.

Conservative
Richard Holden

Shadow Transport Secretary Richard Holden said: "At a time when families should be planning Christmas journeys and looking forward to seeing loved ones, Rachel Reeves is stuffing drivers' stockings with yet another tax.

"On top of raising fuel duty by 5p per litre, Labour are ramming through a half-baked pay-per-mile scheme that will make festive travel more expensive.

Sloppy

"Labour promised there would be no pay-per-mile tax, then wrapped one up to kick in from 2028 and hoped nobody would spot it under the tree. It's rushed, it's sloppy, and it's nothing more than a raid on working people to pay for their welfare bonanza."

Ministers said as recently as September that the government had "no plans" to introduce road pricing. But now they say a charge is needed as electric vehicles contribute to congestion and wear and tear on the roads but are not charged any equivalent to fuel duty.

KFC outlet is fined £70,000 for racial harassment over 'slave' jibe at worker

BY **TED HENNESSEY**

A KFC franchisee has been made to pay nearly £70,000 after a manager called an Indian worker a "slave" and forced him to work extra hours.

Madhesh Ravichandran began working at the West Wickham KFC, South London, for Nexus Foods Limited in January 2023 and was soon working more hours than required in his contract, a London tribunal heard.

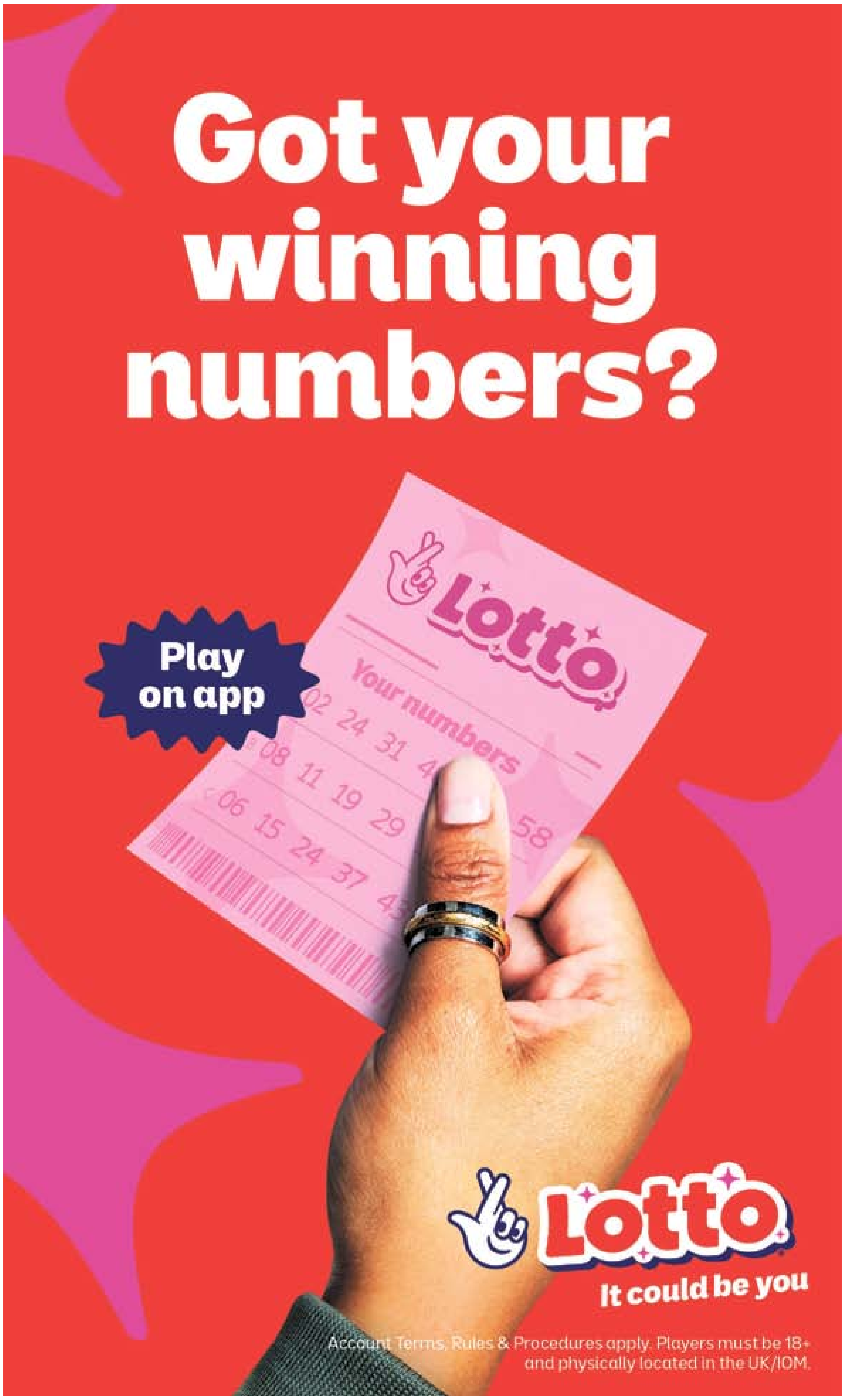
In March 2023, Mr Ravichandran was refused annual leave and heard his boss Kajan Theiventhiram telling a colleague he would prioritise Sri Lankan Tamil staff and referring to the claimant as "this s*" and "this slave", the hearing was told.**

Tribunal judge Paul Abbott found that Mr Ravichandran was "upset and humiliated" and the refusal of the claimant's leave request was "significantly influenced" by his race. He accepted the claimant's evidence that he was being "forced" to work excessive hours because of Mr Theiventhiram's "racially prejudiced attitude" towards him.

Months later, Mr Ravichandran resigned but no real probe took place into his allegations, the tribunal found.

Judge Abbott found Mr Ravichandran was wrongfully dismissed and suffered direct race discrimination, harassment related to race and victimisation.

The claimant was awarded £66,800 in compensation and the tribunal recommended Nexus Foods implements an anti-discrimination training programme for all its staff.



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Diana – in Italy in 1995 – was described as 'predatory' in the pair's war

Diana 'far more skilled in media than Charles' – officials warned

BY **CILLIAN SHERLOCK**

DIANA, Princess of Wales, was "far more" skilled in the media battle with her estranged husband, officials were advised.

The assessment from 30 years ago came in a newly released document which claims the late princess's staff were devoting time to "upstaging" St James's Palace.

It is one revelation among Irish government files made public yesterday in an annual release from the National Archives of Ireland.

King Charles, the then Prince of Wales, made a two-day visit to Ireland in June 1995 – he had separated from Diana in 1992.

The files note that his camp saw coverage of the visit as "part of a long-term public relations strategy to rehabilitate the Prince in the eyes of the British public" after the high-profile split.

His press team, led by Alan Percival and his successor Sandy Henney, had reported to Irish officials that they felt the heir to the throne's visit to Ireland was "the best public outing the Prince has had in a very long time".

Ms Henney was said in the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs' document to be "fiercely loyal" to Charles and "alive to every opportunity to advance his cause".

Approach

A department note shows officials were unsure if she was joking when she suggested Diana might also have wanted to visit Ireland.

The document added: "Henney (who would have been less aware of the political dimension than the more restrained Percival) told me that if she had any say in it the Prince would be here again before the summer was out.

"She also remarked that if practice to date was any guide we could shortly expect an approach from Princess Diana!"

Department official Joe Hayes added: "I took this as a joke until she repeated it and assured me that in the media battle between the two, the Princess was by far the more predatory and skilled and her staff devoted a great deal of time to finding ways and means of upstaging St James's Palace."

Charles' officials agreed with the Irish diplomats that coverage of the visit in the UK was, while positive, "relatively light" compared with blanket coverage in Ireland.

In Diana's explosive Panorama interview in November that year, she talked about her husband's affair, spoke about her bulimia and depression, and expressed a desire to be "queen of people's hearts" rather than a traditional queen.

They divorced in 1996 and she died in 1997 after a Paris car crash.

Diana in 1995 Panorama interview; Prince Charles meets Ireland's president Mary Robinson and husband Nicholas that year

US keen to avoid Clinton and Adams shake pic in 1995 visit

BY **GRAINNE NI AODHA**

THE White House wanted to avoid a photo of Bill Clinton shaking Gerry Adams' hand at a Belfast reception held as part of the US president's historic visit in late 1995.

It was organised at Queen's University, with Irish officials saying the British had "insisted" the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Patrick Mayhew, should host.

Dublin National Archives documents show the Northern Ireland Office had indicated "the Americans would prefer to avoid a handshake photograph between the president and Adams". They would finally be pictured meeting five years later. And while one-on-one meetings had been planned with moderate nationalist politician John Hume in Londonderry and top unionist David Trimble in a car trip after the reception, there was a "general US reluctance" to meet one-on-one with Sinn Fein's Adams and unionist hardliner Ian Paisley.

A genealogy expert found Mr Clinton's suggestion his ancestors were from Co Fermanagh was based "on fantasy" although they may have come from a separate part of Ulster.

Gerry Adams and Bill Clinton shaking hands in 2000

UN force considered for Northern Ireland

THE possibility of Northern Ireland being placed under a United Nations trusteeship with its own force was examined by the Irish government during the Troubles.

Officials were briefed it would only become a possibility if there was an "actual or threatened Loyalist takeover" of Northern Ireland, a British security withdrawal, or where sectarian killings reached such a peak that only UN involvement was likely to end the bloodshed.

And it was noted that a UN trusteeship could only be sanctioned with the permission of the British authorities.

The study suggested that such a trusteeship arrangement could be implemented for a limited period, such as 10 years.

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George and Andy back on top

Buble and Wham! top last charts of the year

BY **CASEY COOPER-FISKE**

POP duo Wham! and singer Michael Buble have topped the final UK singles and albums charts of the year respectively, the Official Charts Company said.

Buble, 50, was No1 in the album chart with 2011's Christmas while Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael topped the singles chart with Last Christmas, which was originally a hit for them in 1984.

It was also Christmas No1 in 2023 and 2024.

In a festive singles chart, the rest of the top five was made up of Mariah Carey's All I Want For Christmas Is You, Brenda Lee's Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree, Kylie Minogue's Xmas, and Fairytale Of New York by The Pogues featuring the late Kirsty MacColl.

Crowned

It comes after Minogue's single was crowned Christmas No1 last week while Last Christmas was No2.

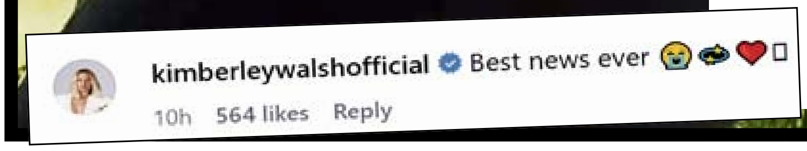
The Australian singer, 57, saw her project Kylie Christmas (Fully Wrapped) return to the album chart top 20, moving up nine places.

Chris Rea's Driving Home For Christmas re-entered the top 10 this week, following the Middlesbrough-born singer's death, aged 74, on Monday.

The rest of the top five in the albums chart was made up of Olivia Dean's The Art Of Loving, Taylor Swift's The Life Of A Showgirl, Sabrina Carpenter's Man's Best Friend and Fleetwood Mac's Rumours.

The Art Of Loving topped the official vinyl chart for the most physical records sold.

Nicola shows off her bump. With Mitch, above right, and her announcement, below



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Something kinda ahh!

Girls aloud star Nicola pregnant

BY **NIKKI ONAFUYE**

GIRLS Aloud star Nicola Roberts will soon be hearing the patter of tiny feet after she announced she is expecting her first child with fiancé Mitch Hahn.

The singer, 40, got engaged to her footballer partner last year and excitedly gave an update to fans.

She said: "Mitch and I have had the most magical Christmas Day sharing the most precious news with our families.

"We've been keeping a secret. We are five months pregnant!

"We can't wait to meet our little one in the spring." Nicola and Mitch, 39, first went public in June 2022 when they attended Elton John's British Summer Time show in Hyde Park.

The couple looked smitten as they enjoyed the gig together, marking Nicola's first public romance in several years.

Celebrity friends were quick to congratulate the Something Kinda Ooooh singer.

Her bandmate Kimberley Walsh called it "best news ever", while TV presenter Laura Whitmore added: "Congrats to you both! The best news!"

Fellow girl band star, Little Mix singer Perrie Edwards, who is expecting her second child with former England footballer Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, said: "The best news. Congrat-ulations beautiful!"

Nicola, second right, with Girls Aloud

Singer Jessie Ware added: "Amazing babe! Congrats!" And This Morning star Ashley James said: "Mega news!! Congratulations."

Nicola rose to fame in 2002 alongside Cheryl Tweedy, Nadine Coyle, Kimberley Walsh and the late Sarah Harding after their girl band won Popstars: The Rivals.

Mitch is the boss of a chartered accountancy firm as well as a semi-pro footballer. Friends say she has "found her soulmate" with the Harlow Town winger, with whom parenthood awaits.

DAILY EXPRESS

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Get-out-of-jail cards are paid for with public's fear

CONVICTED criminals in their thousands enjoyed a very merry Christmas after they were freed from jail ahead of time.

Labour's early-release scheme meant the crooks were left tucking into turkey and mince pies when they should have been doing porridge.

No doubt these offenders were delighted to be released earlier than expected. But their freedom comes at the expense of law-abiding citizens.

It meant that people who should have been locked up were back on the streets too soon, posing a danger to the public.

And prison provides less of a deterrence if potential offenders know that the sentences handed down by courts are unlikely to be fully implemented.

Shocking figures showing 8,269 were let out of jail early are just one illustration of the lawlessness gripping our society.

Shoplifters operate with impunity on many high streets, taking what they want without fear of prosecution.

It creates a climate of fear in town and city centres, while pushing up prices for honest shoppers.

Police need all the help they can get, but are too often diverted away from fighting crime and forced to investigate "non-crime" incidents.

Thankfully, some police chiefs are attempting to end this practice, which not only wastes time but also damages public confidence.

Failure to take crime seriously contributes to a growing sense that this government, safe in a middle-class Westminster cocoon, has no idea how hard life is becoming for people across the UK.

Sir Keir Starmer and his Labour colleagues are on course for a very rude awakening next time voters are invited to have their say.

ECHR exit clamour grows

THERE'S a growing consensus that the European Convention on Human Rights is hindering efforts to control the United Kingdom's borders, stop illegal immigration and ensure that people with no right to be here are sent home.

Even the Labour government agrees there is a problem.

The question, however, is whether the Convention can in some way be improved, or whether we should quit it entirely.

Senior Conservative Peter Lilley has delivered a clear verdict. The Tory peer argues convincingly that withdrawal is the only realistic option.

Lord Lilley's comments echo the views of Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch.

With his many years of experience at the highest levels of politics, he should be listened to carefully.

Shop local to save stores

BOXING Day sales shoppers failed to turn out in sufficient numbers to put smiles on the faces of worried retailers already feeling the pinch from higher taxes.

Our high streets are the hearts of our communities and a vital part of local economies.

They need backing from Rachel Reeves and her government colleagues – and we can all help by backing our local retailers too.

Rebels without a cause between them circling for PM's job

Unwanted man Starmer is disliked by 72% of voters

Sam Lister

Deputy Editor

KEIR Starmer's aides insist that 2026 is the year his fortunes will turn around, but his fate is no longer in his own hands. The Prime Minister's reputation is now so low that crowds show their fury at public events he isn't even attending.

At the Royal Variety Performance, the audience booed the mere mention of his name as a comedian embarked on an impersonation of the PM.

During the World Darts Championship, fans broke out into chants of "Keir Starmer's a w*****", something football fans started earlier in the year.

The Prime Minister's Cabinet is in open revolt and those intent on replacing him are circling, waiting for their moment.

For most of the country – a staggering 72% of voters view him unfavourably – Starmer's political demise this year would be the fresh start the nation needs. But the contenders to replace him do little to instil any sense of new year hope and optimism.

Wes Streeting showed how little authority his boss now has with an interview that can only be interpreted as a pitch for the top job, the second in the space of a month.

The Health Secretary is unsubtle, calling for Britain to rejoin the EU's customs union, something Starmer has ruled out twice in the past month.

RANGING far off his beat, Streeting flashed some ankle at Labour members who desperately want to hitch the UK back up to Brussels. Pictured gazing beatifically into the middle distance as he walked through Hainault Forest, he coyly claimed: "I'm diplomatically ducking the question. This is not a pitch or a job application."

Just a few weeks earlier, he told the New Statesman he was frustrated with how Starmer had been presenting his administration as a "maintenance department for the country".

But surely the man who has told us the winter flu crisis will be so bad that it is "probably the worst pressure the NHS has faced since Covid" should be focusing on that instead of cosy interviews setting out his stall?

Let's not forget that we have just endured the 14th round of strikes by junior doctors and more are threatened.

Streeting settled quickly with the BMA after the general election, awarding a 29% pay hike without securing any changes in working practices in return. Unsurprisingly, the radical union spotted a naive negotiator and is now back for another 26%.

Meanwhile, in Manchester, Andy Burnham is scrambling around trying to find a safe Labour seat (good luck with that one) so he can parachute back into Parliament to save the day. The city's mayor has twice stood for the Labour leadership but believes it's third time lucky. If you are fed up with Starmer's flip flopping then brace yourselves if Burnham wins. The former health secretary blows with the wind, one minute a Blairite, the next a hero of the Left.

He began work as a parliamentary researcher at 24, became an MP, reached the Cabinet and quit in 2017, insisting he hates Westminster despite nearly a quarter of a century in it. His love of Armani suits – he used to buy two a year – has been quietly forgotten after a make-under that means he seemingly only wears cagoules in a role as "King of the North". As an MP, Burnham was ridiculed after insisting Labour "simply cannot abstain" in its opposition to the Tory government's welfare reforms – minutes after abstaining in a vote on the same measures.

He also criticised those who called for a second Brexit referendum, then backed down when the unions got involved. Earlier this year, a Labour source said: "He's agreed with so many different views, he's forgotten his own mind."

HOVERING in the background is Angela Rayner, who is writing a memoir that her publisher says will allow "her authenticity to shine through – and an empowering vision for a fairer, kinder society that will enable everyone to flourish".

Rayner has more time than she used to after a return to the backbenches following an accidental spot of redistribution of wealth as she failed to hand over enough cash to the taxman.

Too late, sadly, to stop the damage caused by her radical workers' rights reforms that will cripple small businesses.

Red Ed Miliband insists he does not want another crack at being Labour leader, but "friends" have let it be known he wants to be the country's next Chancellor. As if the country hasn't suffered enough!

Whatever the new year brings politically, strap in because it is going to be a bumpy ride.

'Streeting's interview can only be interpreted as a pitch for top job'

Lucy Beresford

PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND BROADCASTER

Misogyny's a lesson for all

I wonder what 2026 has in store for Kemi Badenoch? At the beginning of 2025, within her first 100 days, some MPs were muttering darkly about "time limits" and plotting her downfall.

Fast forward nearly 12 months, and the woman whose fiery red dress for the final PMQs before Christmas set the tone for her feisty seasonal quips, looks far more confident.

I was at a political drinks party recently and even those who voted for her leadership rival Robert Jenrick have now been seduced by Kemi's intriguing mixture of brains, ideas and, well, sass!

Who else but Kemi could combine a recent visit to Brands Hatch to announce a policy to scrap grants for electric vehicles with a fashion show runway strut in red high heels?

And lest you think focusing on her fashion sense is frivolous, I believe what we wear and how we wear it is an important part of our psychology.

Wearing nice clothes is a way to honour ourselves, and fashion can boost our mood or allow us to playfully reinvent ourselves each day. So as well as Clever Kemi here's to more Catwalk Kemi in 2026.

That's a perfect resolution for the Tories.

I NEARLY spat out my mince pie when I read that some white female academics have decided the laws banning Female Genital Mutilation are a relic of colonialism. In an article published by the British Medical Journal Group, these so-called intellectuals suggested that, because some women around the world elect to have cosmetic procedures such as labia reduction, then we have no right to criticise those cultures (mainly in Africa) where non-consensually sewing shut the vaginas of newborns and children is still legal.

Have these academics ever enjoyed sexual ecstasy? Do they adore their own bodies? Who on earth do they think they are, viewing from their lofty ivory tower of academia the "customs" of a culture which cuts the clitoris of a child, refusing to allow such girls to grow up knowing sexual pleasure.

It made me reflect on the government's new plans to send boys from the age of 11 on anti-misogyny courses. These courses are meant to challenge toxic ideas about women, consent, and relationships. Teachers will get increased training, and boys exhibiting "worrying behaviour" could be enrolled on special programmes.

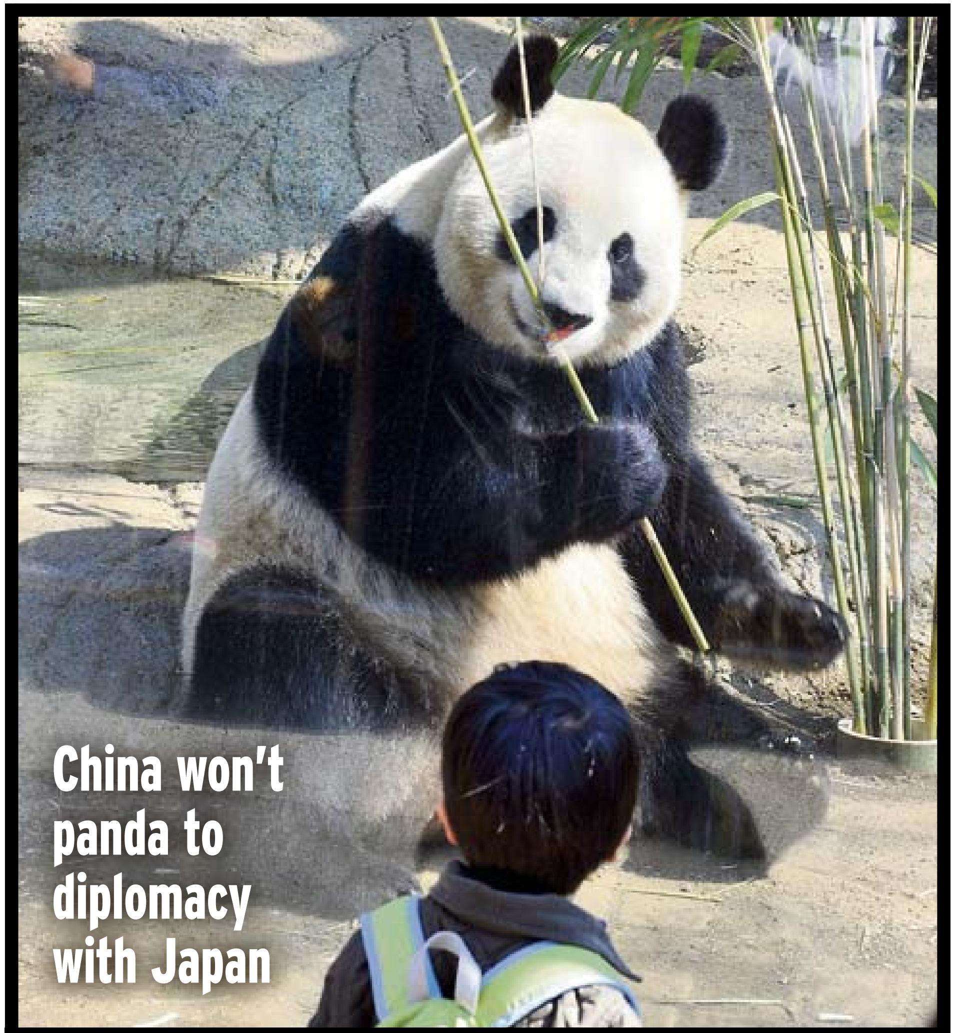
But to my mind, these new plans don't go nearly far enough. As the essay on FGM from female academics shows, women are just as likely to turn a blind eye to violence against women and girls and this needs to be called out.

All pupils, not just boys, should be enrolled in these programmes, so that girls too can be equipped to call out misogyny whatever its source – even female academics.

And parents need educating too, as often they don't realise that their adult banter can reinforce prejudicial stereotypes around females, banter which children copy unfiltered.

Yes Safeguarding Minister Jess Phillips, the toxic misogyny must be challenged – but your plans fall woefully short.

Picture: YOSHIKAZU TSUNO/GETTY



China won't panda to diplomacy with Japan

WHEN I was a Saturday girl at M&S, the most hilarious day of the year was the first day of opening immediately after Christmas. Staff from other departments were drafted on to the extended Customer Service desks, where by far and away the most unpopular items of clothing being returned by disgruntled wives and girlfriends was red underwear, bought presumably in a panic on Christmas Eve by bewildered husbands and boyfriends.

Are you currently surrounded by gifts you don't like or need? And are you planning your next trip to the charity shop to donate your unwanted presents? Then spare a thought for animal lovers in Japan.

Tokyo's Ueno Zoo is set to lose two giant pandas when they are returned to China next month before the end of their formal gifted loan – without any replacement gift being lined up. This is because of increased political tension between Tokyo and Beijing after comments by the new Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi about the defence of Taiwan. China in particular is known for its panda diplomacy. The Chinese Communist Party's first gift of pandas was to the Soviet Union to mark the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1957. Between 1958 and 1982, China gifted 23 pandas to nine different countries.

Sadly, Japan will be gift-free in a month's time.

ALONG with fashion, I believe make-up is important psychologically. I speak as someone who was banned from wearing make-up by my mother. Even now, I feel very under-skilled at applying it successfully and I wish I had had the chance to experiment more when I was a teenager.

So I am very cross with Haygrove School in Bridgwater, Somerset, which has banned make-up in years 7 to 9. They say research shows that "appearance-based concerns can emerge early and, if unaddressed, may lead to anxiety, poor mental health, and disengagement from learning".

But I urge them to flip this on its head and think again. In my clinical work, healthy self-care is a sign of secure wellbeing, while someone who doesn't take care of themselves, say, by washing their hair, or cleaning under their fingernails, might be displaying signs of sadness or despair.

During adolescence, when raging hormones can trigger weight gain or acne, make-up and other skincare products can be an elegant way for a pupil to feel a bit more confident – a bit more in control.

Teenagers with spots often feel so hideous they skip lessons.

Of course no one needs false eyelashes, but here's to a world where teenagers are not vilified for having some harmless fun.

WE ALL NEED A CHEERLEADER TO ENSURE RESOLUTIONS ARE THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

BY NOW we've all eaten or drunk too much, spent so much time cooped up with loved ones that they are no longer quite so loved, and the year is hurtling to its close.

All eyes are on the New Year and, with it, the thrilling chance to shape our future and manifest the life of our dreams.

So how do you want your 2026 to be? And how can you ensure your resolutions are not consigned along with the tinsel and wrapping paper to the bin by the end of the first week of January? You could consult a professional. Traditionally psychotherapists see a spike in self-referrals during the first two weeks in January. And gyms and dating websites also see their most sign-ups after Christmas.

But here are my Top Three free tips to make sure resolutions stick.

Firstly, be very clear about your goal(s). Do you want to lose weight? Or do you want to lose weight because your bigger goal is to find a life partner? Having a reason for your goal gives you added motivation.

Secondly, plan your strategy. If your plan is to eat more healthily, do your research around the foods you need to keep at home at all times. This means you are less likely to be stuck one day and resort to eating junk.

And thirdly, tell everyone your goal. This means you have people around you keeping you accountable. They are your cheerleaders, celebrating your wins and giving you pep talks when you wobble.

And if you don't feel ready to share your goal yet with anyone, find me on social media (X @lucyberesford or Insta @thelucyberesford1) and tell me instead. I can cheerlead for you behind the scenes!

● **Carole Malone is away**

DAILY EXPRESSO SEE HOST JJ ANISIOBI AND GUESTS IN NEW EPISODES MONDAY TO FRIDAY ON THE EXPRESS YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Stranger Things star signs off in ‘cherish’ plea to fans

Noah Schnapp, left, and Finn Wolfhard (Mike Wheeler)

BY **LAUREN DEL FABBRO**

NOAH Schnapp says Stranger Things fans should “cherish” the series’ last moments in its penultimate episodes ahead of the New Year’s Day finale.

He plays Will Byers in the hit Netflix sci-fi series about friends in an Indiana town battling dark forces from another dimension, the Upside Down.

In the first series of the 1980s drama Will is lost in it and his pals try to find him with the help of psychokinetic Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown).

The fifth series was split into three, with volume two out yesterday – and the finale sees the town in quarantine as the friends come up against antagonist Vecna for one final time.

Noah, 21, said: “As we head into the final week...please take a moment to really soak it in. Cherish these last moments, finding comfort in your favourite characters.

“One of the greatest joys for me has been...knowing how much this show has meant to so many people who needed connection.”

The massive franchise, which began in 2016, has featured a stage play, video games, novels and merchandise.

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Judy Parfitt as Sister Monica Joan in Call the Midwife

BY **NICOLA METHVEN**

THE prequel of BBC1’s Call the Midwife, set at the start of the Second World War and featuring younger versions of three of the show’s best known characters, will launch on Christmas Day 2026.

Despite the audience not yet knowing the actors playing the younger versions of Jenny Agutter’s Sister Julienne, Pam Ferris’ Sister Evangelina or Judy Parfitt’s Sister Monica Joan, bosses have such confidence in fans tuning in that the drama is expected to keep its prime festive slot.

Introducing the upcoming 15th series, producer Pippa Harris was asked if the Beeb was concerned about being left with “a blank space” for 2026.

She replied: “No, it will be on at Christmas...”

That festive outing will be the first glimpse viewers have of the wartime spin-off, the work of writer Heidi Thomas, who wanted to take the story further back.

She explained: “Having wept, laughed, and raged my way from 1957 to 1971, I found myself yearning to delve into the deeper past.”

The brand new series, which does not yet have a title and will film next year, is set in 1939, nearly two decades before Jennifer Worth’s original memoirs began.

Heidi admits she needed a “temporary pause in the usual pattern” after 15 years of Call the Midwife. “I don’t think any other show has produced a series every year for that period of time,” she said. “So I think this is a lovely opportunity for us to refresh a little bit and come back with more exciting things.”

She stressed that a 16th series, picking up in 1973, would still be on TV in due course. “We’re not going anywhere,” she stressed. “Except for maybe Australia.”

A movie version for cinema release, set in 1972 and featuring the regular cast, is likely to be set there.

Heidi said: “Australia is likely, I can say that. But there are a number of places within Australia where that could be, all of which would be very different. We won’t be making any official announcements until we know exactly.” One possibility is Miriam Margolyes, 84, will make a welcome return as Mother Mildred.

Helen George, who has played nurse Trixie Aylward since the first episode aired in 2012, said she was happy to have a year off.

“The truth is no one knows who’s going to be in the film yet,” she admitted. “It has to make sense that all of these characters end up in Australia. So even though I may want to go – of course I do! – it can’t be so extraordinary that it doesn’t make sense.”

She said a feature-length film would provide the “space and the

GERMAINE GREER
THE FEMALE EUNUCH

Jenny Agutter in BBC show as Sister Julienne, above. Helen George, in coat with fur collar, as Trixie at the rights demo in the show, right and below. Trixie in her uniform, far right

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Call The Midwife stars on future plans for a prequel and a movie

Labour of love

time” to explore their characters further. “Australia is so beautiful, when we did the South African Christmas special it was so cinematic and the lighting is all different.

“This would be their missionary work, potentially, because this is what the nuns would do,” she said.

Fascinating

“It makes complete sense for them to branch out into the world.”

Trixie was not born in 1939, but Helen, 41, believes that expanding the Nonnatus world backwards is also a fantastic idea.

“The prequel will have characters that we know so well but we’ll be going back and seeing the start. When we first began we’d have sets with the remnants of buildings that had been bombed in the blitz. It’s fascinating to go even further back and I will definitely be watching. It’s right to change the format, we all need a new lease of life.”

In series 15, starting next month, it is 1971 and the midwives and nurses are getting to grips with the women’s liberation movement.

In one scene some of the Nonnatus regulars are seen burning their bras and, while she did not do that herself, actress Linda Bassett, 75, (nurse Phyllis Crane) said she got involved in other ways.

“I was involved in various women’s groups,” she said. “It was all about being free and feeling at one with your body and not being ashamed.”

Annabelle Apsion, 65, who plays Poplar’s much-loved mayor and shopowner Violet Buckle said it had been fun to film the bra-burning, with some members of the team finding it quite emotional. “Lisa, who directed it, was crying, because she remembered all of that. A lot of young women now don’t realise how things were.

“It would probably be a shock to them to hear that women didn’t get the same pay for the same job.”

Helen, who has two young daughters, said the scenes resonated with her and made her fearful of where the world is heading right now. How far away are we from The Handmaid’s Tale in reality?

“That’s a world that could quite easily be here in a couple of years. I don’t think we should ever rest on our laurels,” she said.

Jenny Agutter, 73, says this series is filled with edgy change, which made it feel different. The whole series is no longer cosy,” she said. “One looks towards the future that hopefully will be better, but it feels a little dangerous. .”

In the first episode, Sister Veronica (Rebecca Gethings), has to deal with the realisation that her biological clock is ticking, despite her decision to become a nun. She will turn to her close friend Geoffrey, Trixie’s brother, for support.

Actor Chris Harper said: “Rebecca’s performance across this series is just phenomenal. I know it’s going to hit people’s hearts.”

On a happier note, pastor Cyril and midwife Rosalind’s inter-racial relationship continues to go from strength to strength.

Actor Zephryn Taitte said their fight is one of many going on.

“What strikes me is that they’re actually sacrificing a lot for each other,” he mused. This type of relationship isn’t new for the 70s, but they have to fight for what they really want and it has echoes with the women’s movement.”

January Series 15 to air on BBC1, set in 1971
Spring Filming starts on the wartime prequel with new cast
End of the year Filming starts on movie version, set in 1972
Christmas Prequel will air first episode on Christmas Day
2027 Movie released in cinemas
Spring 2027 Filming likely to start on series 16 for BBC1, set in 1973

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Late Kate's well worth the weight

J I COUNT myself lucky to have enjoyed fairly happy, contented schooldays. I went to Manchester High for Girls and on the whole it was a friendly, non-abrasive experience. The only jarring moment I can recall was the time I was peremptorily summoned to the headmistress's office after morning assembly.

Glaring at me over pince-nez, she said another member of staff had observed me after school the previous afternoon "walking home in an insolent manner'.

To this day I haven't a clue what she was talking about. How does anyone walk "in an insolent manner"? Let alone a 16-year-old girl dawdling her way home from school, probably (knowing me, then and now) completely lost in thought.

Ah well.

Anyway, I recalled that past to which there can be no return this week, when I listened to Kate Winslet on Desert Island Discs.

I really liked her. Feisty, confident, and more than willing to settle old scores – very old scores, in Kate's case.

And I didn't blame her. She told Lauren Laverne (who has developed into a fine presenter of this much-cherished programme): "My drama teacher told me I would only ever play 'the fat girl parts'. Well look at me now!

"But that wasn't very nice, was it? It's appalling the things people think they can say to children." (Certainly a lot worse than "walking in an insolent manner").

And that was just the faculty. Kate's compatriots were even crueller. Jealous classmates (presumably noticing Winslet's innate acting ability and resenting her for it) bullied the teenager remorselessly over her weight, so much so that she virtually stopped eating.

"I have to say: 'Look, you lot who were in my year at school, you were bloody horrible to me, and you should be ashamed'."

Kate's subsequent success speaks for itself. A beautiful woman, a fine actress (her lead in the recent television police drama Mare Of Easttown was breathtakingly good) and punchy as all heck. Love her.

R **WILL America invade Greenland in 2026? Imagine reading that question a couple of years ago. You'd think it was a misprint, or the opening line for some gag or other. But with President Donald Trump's hands on the levers of power, anything is possible. Trump operates with a blind disregard for the rules. He is, without a shred of doubt, the most narcissistic, self-obsessed president in US history. His sheer egotistical bravado somehow allows him to get away with stuff which would have sunk any of his predecessors – sexual boasts about "grabbing p***y" cruel, spiteful comments about critics who've literally just died; crazy claims about personally ending wars which in reality continue unabated.**

Some of Trump's more recent off-the-cuff speeches and statements have been beyond bizarre – rambling, disjointed utterances which make little or no sense at all. Some in Washington are beginning to whisper "the Biden-word" – dementia.

So will he annex Greenland next year – and then Canada? He's said he wants to. Sometimes a cliche says it best. So here it is. You couldn't make it up.

Richard&Judy

BRITAIN'S BEST-LOVED HUSBAND AND WIFE TEAM REFLECT ON THE WEEK'S EVENTS EVERY SATURDAY IN YOUR DAILY EXPRESS

R THERE was some pretty good Christmas TV this year, wasn't there? But for me, it was the Amandaland seasonal special that justified the licence fee. Not just because of the inspired casting of Joanna Lumley and Jennifer Saunders (Ab-Fab, everyone) but, for me, the show's eponymous lead, Amanda. Lucy Punch's inspired character is quite simply the funniest thing on TV right now. She's a beauty but also a klutz too... with absurd delusions of grandeur (unable to face admitting the fact she now lives in unfashionable South Harlsden, Amanda insists on calling it "So-ha". Brilliant). Much more of this genius in 2026 please.

Do the maths... is 42 the answer?

R IT'S ALMOST New Year. But I'm not going to look ahead over the next 12 months (I'll be doing that in the December 31 edition of this newspaper, along with my fellow Express columnists).

No, I'm casting a longer view than that – 50 years or so into the future. Allow me to explain.

In my lifetime, people who speculated that there must surely be intelligent life on other worlds – or any kind of life, come to that – were mostly dismissed as cranks, wishful thinkers, or even heretics. Such thinking was seen as un-Christian: God had seen fit to make himself flesh in human form here on Earth. It was tantamount to sacrilege to suggest He may have done something similar elsewhere in His universe.

But over the past decade or two, there's been a quiet revolution in thinking. Respectable thinking, I mean. This week, one of Britain's leading space scientists announced she is "absolutely convinced" that aliens are out there – and that they will be found (or will find us) within the next half-century.

Dame Maggie Aderin-Pocock, of University College London's Department of Physics and Astronomy, said that while any alien life could be very primitive, it's perfectly possible we will shortly encounter a presence with technology "far superior" to our own.

It's the maths. The maths tells us that the chances of us being alone in the universe are vanishingly small.

Respectable thinking amongst the science fraternity says we are not alone

The genius that was the late Professor Stephen Hawking wrote in his final book Brief Answers To The Big Questions: "It is a self-evident truth that if the universe was not fundamentally suitable for life, we wouldn't be here asking why it is so finely adjusted for it (life)."

We now know that planets that orbit distant suns such as ours have water, oxygen, and carbon dioxide – the essential constituents for, and giveaway fingerprints of, life. And that's just in our own little medium-sized galaxy. There are trillions of galaxies. The chemistry and physics that allowed simple life to form on Earth, and fairly swiftly evolve into humans, is replicated throughout the universe.

So why haven't we been contacted by other life forms? Hawking again: "We've simply been overlooked." By which he meant that intelligent life is so abundant that our modest version of it doesn't count for much in a universe positively seething with life. Or, he suggested, those alien life forms are simply so far away, they can't easily reach us, "otherwise they would have visited Earth by now. And I think we would have known. It would be like the film Independence Day."

Indeed, Hawkings's last thoughts on the matter were cautionary.

"If we ever do receive messages from another advanced civilisation, we need to be wary about answering back until we have developed a bit further... it might be a bit like the original inhabitants of America meeting Columbus. I don't think they thought they were better off for it."

J THANK Christmas I don't live in Brighton and Hove. The city has something called Brighton and Hove Museums which is surely a late finalist for this year's Most Woke awards. The headlines said it all: "Santa deemed too white and judgmental". Yup. A museum blog blethers that "the tale of a white, Western Santa who judges all children's behaviour has problems" and "does not recognise the complex realities colonised people face". It is wrong "to be rewarding children based on a Western binary of naughty/nice." Thank goodness Santa paid no attention. He came down our chimney as usual. Yours too, I'll bet.

THE CRUELLEST THING TO HAPPEN TO KINDEST ROCK STAR CHRIS

Chris Rea was kind and caring

J LORD knows how many people I've interviewed, solo or alongside Richard, over my career. People sometimes ask who was the best/worst/funniest/ etc. Oddly enough, no one ever asks who was the kindest. Well, here's the answer anyway.

Chris Rea. Chris Rea was the kindest, warmest, most empathic person I've ever interviewed.

It was a good few years ago. I'd been forced to take three months away from This Morning, while I recovered from major surgery.

Chris made no reference to that during our on-air conversation, but afterwards he was full of sympathetic questions (he had, of course, endured many significant surgical procedures himself by then).

He gave me excellent, hard-won advice on recovery, and then off he went. But it wasn't the last I would hear from him.

For months afterwards, he'd regularly send me affectionate cards, notes and messages of support and encouragement.

He was a truly lovely, lovely man and his passing this week has left me very sad indeed. RIP, dearest Chris.

Trump's 'deadly' blitz on ISIS in Nigeria

BY **CHRIS HUGHES**

DONALD Trump confirmed the US had launched "powerful and deadly" air strikes against ISIS terrorists in Nigeria following "vicious" attacks on Christians.

In a Christmas evening message, the US President said the attack was directed at "ISIS Terrorist Scum in Northwest Nigeria who have been targeting and viciously killing, primarily, innocent Christians, at levels not seen for many years, and even Centuries!".

Using his Truth Social platform, he said: "I have previously warned these Terrorists that if they did not stop the slaughtering of Christians, there would be hell to pay, and tonight, there was.

"Under my leadership, our Country will not allow Radical Islamic Terrorism to prosper. May God Bless our Military, and MERRY CHRISTMAS to all, including the dead Terrorists, of which there will be many more if their slaughter of Christians continues."

Camps run by Islamic State groups in Sokoto state, which lies on Nigeria's border with Niger, were hit in the Christmas Day attacks, the US military said, adding an initial assessment suggested multiple fatalities.

Attacks

Nigeria, which is battling multiple armed groups, said the US strikes were part of an exchange of intelligence and strategic coordination with the US. Foreign Minister Yusuf Maitama Tuggar told the BBC the operation had "nothing to do with a particular religion".

Residents and analysts have said Nigeria's security crisis affects both Christians, predominant in the south, and Muslims, who are the majority in the north.

The extent of the attacks was not yet known yesterday but it is believed more assaults are expected.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth warned of "more to come".

A resident in the village of Jabo told BBC News: "Everyone thought it [the strike] was a plane.

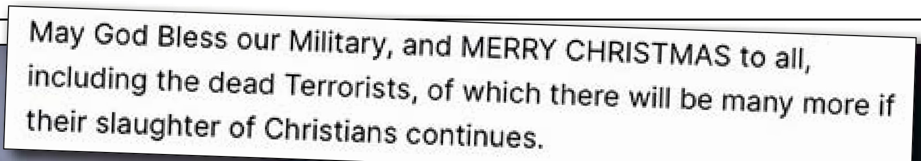
"It crashed in fields. We live peacefully, and there is no conflict between us and Christians."

Armed groups in Africa's most populous country include at least two affiliated with the Islamic State. One is an offshoot of the Boko Haram group known as the Islamic State West Africa Province in the north east. The other is the Islamic State Sahel Province, known locally as Lakurawa, which is prominent in the north west.

Analysts said the target, if indeed against IS militants, was likely to have been members of Lakurawa, which became more lethal in border states such as Sokoto and Kebbi in the last year, often targeting security forces and remote communities.

The Nigerian military has said the group has roots in Niger and became more active in Nigeria's border communities following a 2023 coup.

Lakurawa has become known for killings, kidnapping, rape and armed robbery, according to Malik Samuel, a security researcher with Good Governance Africa.



May God Bless our Military, and MERRY CHRISTMAS to all, including the dead Terrorists, of which there will be many more if their slaughter of Christians continues.

A US ship takes part in the military operation, main picture. The President's post on Truth Social, above. Soldiers examine site of attack, left

Two killed in Israel attack

BY **JON COATES**

TWO people were killed during a car ramming and stabbing rampage in north Israel yesterday.

Police said a Palestinian man from the West Bank first drove into people in the city of Beit She'an, killing one man and injuring a teenage boy.

The suspect then sped on to a main road and fatally stabbed a young woman, before he was shot and wounded by a civilian passer-by as he headed to nearby Afula.

The two-year war in Gaza, in which tens of thousands of Palestinians have died, has sparked a surge of violence in Israel and the occupied West Bank – including attacks by both Palestinian militants and by Israeli settlers.

Stab spree at tyre factory

BY **MATTHEW DOOLEY**

A MAN has been arrested after stabbing eight people and injuring seven others with chemicals at a tyre plant in Japan yesterday.

Officials said five of the knife victims were in serious condition after the rampage in Yokohama Rubber Co., Mishima, west of Tokyo.

The suspect, 38, was carrying a survival knife and wearing a gas mask.

Seven people were injured by a bleach-like substance thrown at them. They were taken to hospital for treatment, the fire department said.

Japan has strict gun control laws but there have been a number of high-profile knife attacks in recent years.

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Sir James Dyson: 'I don't think we're keen on making things'

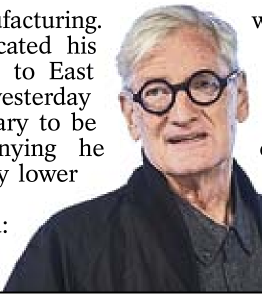
BY **CHRISTOPHER McKEON**

MANUFACTURERS would stay in the UK if the government and the country "wanted it", billionaire Sir James Dyson said.

The inventor, 78, believes that children's "enthusiasm for making things" gets "stamped out of them".

He said: "They see a problem and they go about solving it imaginatively. If only society was like that. We had lots of engineers who could develop new technologies, make things work better and create wealth and jobs."

Sir James, who was guest editing the BBC's Today programme yesterday, has long called on Conservative and Labour governments to do more to aid UK manufacturing. Despite this, he relocated his production operations to East Asia in 2002 and yesterday claimed it was necessary to be nearer suppliers, denying he had been motivated by lower labour costs.



Sir James, *right*, said: "When we moved, which I didn't want to but I was forced to, everyone else was moving [too].

"You've got to be close to your suppliers for quality, for improving the technology and for quick supply."

Dyson does have a research and development base in Britain, and asked what the UK could do to boost its manufacturing, Sir James said: "Politicians talk an awful lot but I don't think we get things done.

"I don't think we're keen on making things. We've lost our interest in engineering and manufacturing.

"It's a great shame, because it is a wealth creator and it creates jobs."

Picture: PETER BYRNE/PA

Shoppers in Liverpool and, below, Oxford Street, London

Hard-hit high street shops fear a Boxing Day sales flop

BY **JONATHAN WALKER**

SHOPPERS hunting Boxing Day bargains stayed away from the nation's high streets as customer numbers fell.

Retail parks bucked the trend with a 6.9% increase in shoppers compared with December 26 last year.

However, that wasn't enough to compensate for a huge lack of demand elsewhere. Overall footfall was down 0.3% on last year in a blow to struggling retailers.

It followed warnings that Boxing Day bargain hunters would spend £1billion less than 12 months ago, as the cost-of-living crisis continues.

Spending was set to fall from £4.6bn in 2024 to £3.6bn this year.

Yesterday's figures, from tech experts MRI Software, showed footfall drastically down from a week ago, suggesting people shopped early and chose to stay at home after Christmas.

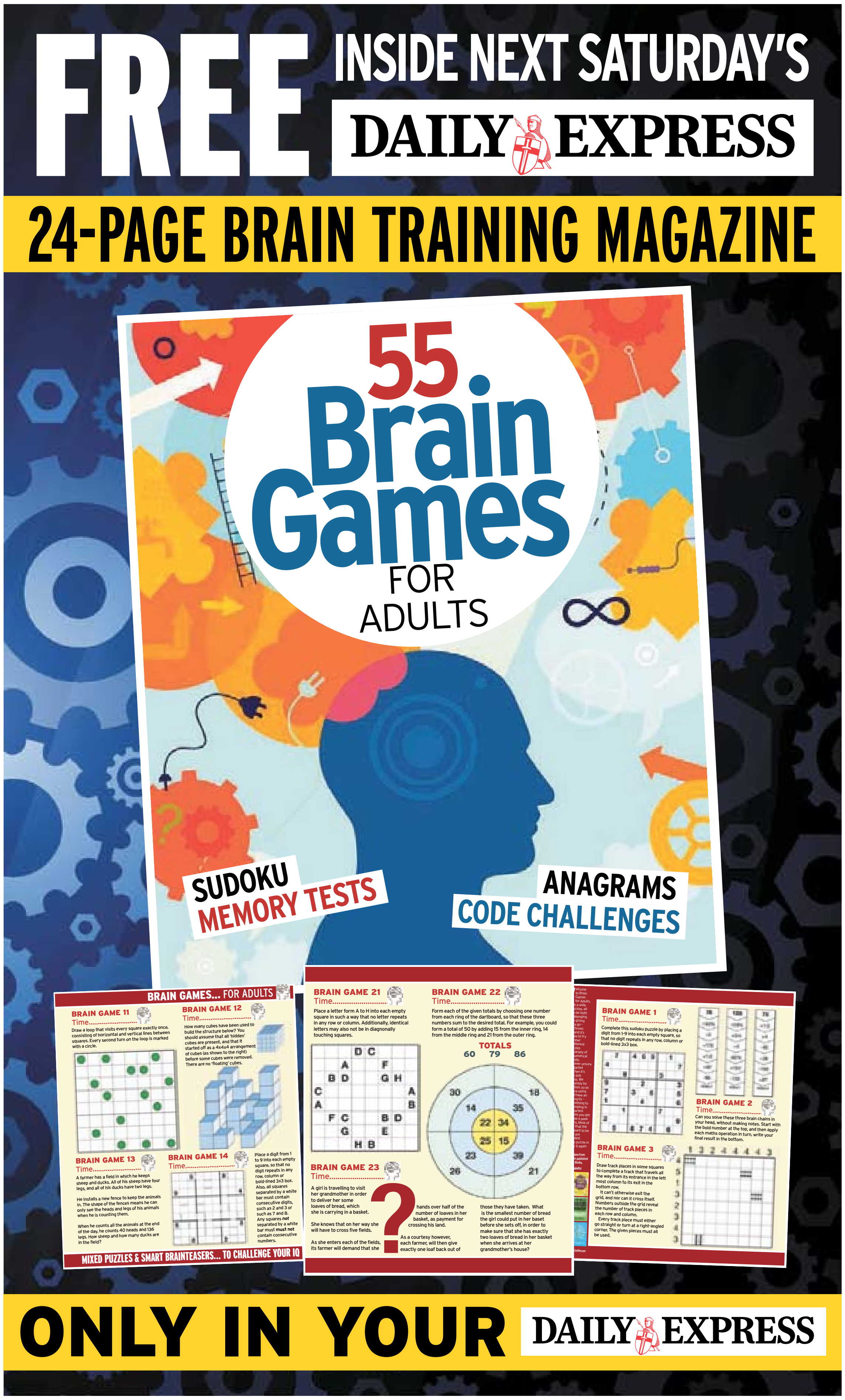
Central London retailers suffered most, with numbers down 7.7% year-on-year, while regional city high streets saw customer numbers fall 4.4%.

Shop managers have urged the government to stop piling extra costs on businesses. Shoppers' budgets are also stretched, with seven in 10 telling a Barclays survey that cost pressures are affecting their spending.

Jenni Matthews, retail analyst at MRI Software, said: "It has been a tough year for retailers."

Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, said: "The government needs to allow businesses to flourish."

OPINION: PAGE 14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GAME, SET AND

As Aryna Sabalenka prepares to take on Nick Kyrgios in tennis's new Battle of the Sexes clash, SPENCER VIGNES looks back at the 1973 match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs that smashed gender stereotypes and helped drive women's equality in sport

IT HAS been dubbed "The Battle of the Sexes", a festive season tennis showdown in Dubai between former Wimbledon finalist Nick Kyrgios, the sport's so-called bad boy, and Aryna Sabalenka, the best female player on the planet.

Australian Kyrgios, representing "the men's side" as he describes it, reckons he will win comfortably tomorrow, despite having only played six competitive matches in the past three years. "Do you really think I have to try 100%?" he even suggested at one point. Belarusian tennis player Sabalenka, on the other hand, is determined to "try my best and kick his ass".

Depending on which side of the fence you're on, it's either entertaining box office gold, or it's divisive and degrading.

But for those of a certain age, if you think we've been here before then you're right.

The year was 1973.

Flares were all the rage along with platform shoes, glam rock and David Cassidy.

A woman's place, according to many, was in the kitchen. And when it came to tennis, a sport which had only gone professional five years previously, the ladies were still very much second-class citizens, bereft of competitive tournaments to play in and earning far less than their male counterparts.

Enter 55-year-old Bobby Riggs.

A self-proclaimed "male-chauvinist pig", Riggs had been one of the best tennis players in the world back in his day, capturing Wimbledon's prestigious triple crown in 1939 by winning the men's singles, the men's doubles (with Elwood Cooke) and the mixed doubles (with Alice Marble).

By 1973, however, the bespectacled Riggs had garnered a reputation as an opinionated hustler. Whether he meant half of what he said remains open to debate.

Nevertheless, his skills at self-promotion and winding people up were second to none.

DECLARING that the women's game was far inferior to that of the men's, Riggs started laying down a series of challenges to some of the best female players of the era. Even in middle-age, so he boasted, the Californian reckoned he could still beat the likes of Chris Evert, Margaret Court and Billie Jean King.

"He kept chasing me around and showing up at tournaments for at least two years," King once recalled. "He'd say, 'Come on, we gotta play this match, whoo, win lots of money, whoo'. I'd go 'Bobby, I'm exhausted – I can't even think about playing you'.

"So then he started asking Chris Evert, Nancy (Richey, the former Australian and French Open champion).

"I think he asked a lot of people, and Margaret Court accepted the challenge.

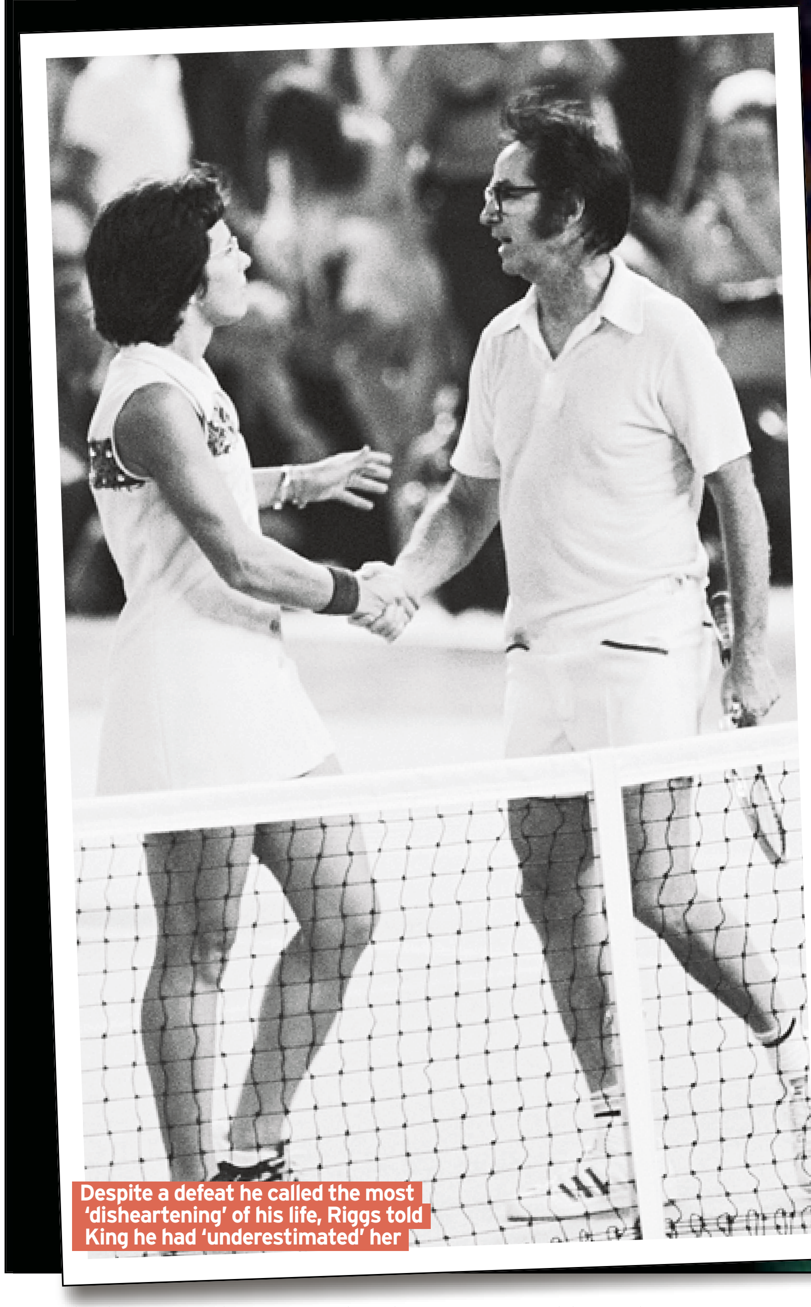
"I saw her (Court) in Detroit. We were coming down in a lift, and she said, 'Oh, by the way, I'm playing Bobby'. And I went 'What? You said yes to him?'

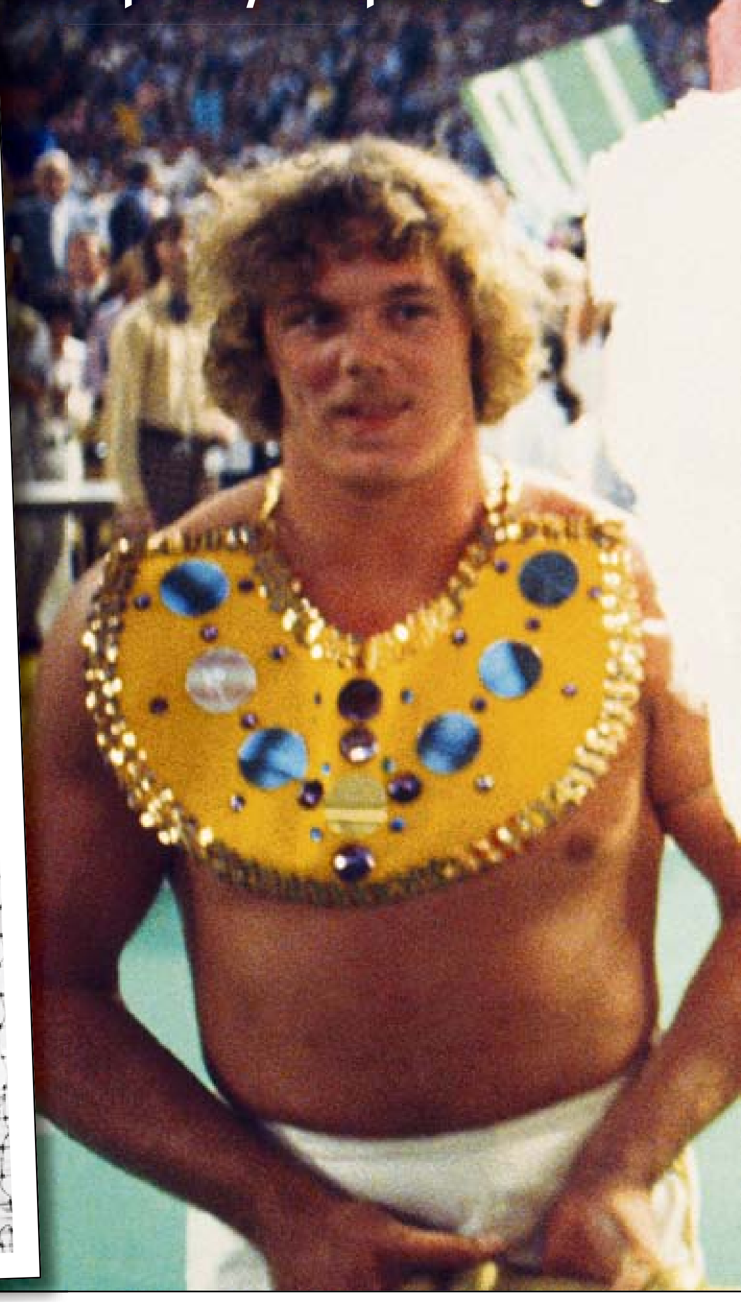
"She said, 'Well, I'm getting thirty-five thousand dollars'. I said, 'Are you kidding? I don't blame you then!'

"But, I said, 'Remember – this is not just about tennis. This is about a lot of things'.

"I said 'Margaret, please win this match. If you don't win this match, it's going to be… just win please'. And she says 'Okay'."

Margaret Court didn't win the match. On May 13, 1973, in what became known as the "Mother's Day Massacre", Riggs beat her 6-2 6-1 in San Diego. Before play started, Riggs had presented Court with a bouquet of red roses, which the Australian player accepted before curtseying in return.


Despite a defeat he called the most 'disheartening' of his life, Riggs told King he had 'underestimated' her



It was a gesture many observers saw as being subservient, paving the way to defeat against her middle-aged male opponent.

The moment she heard the score, King knew she had to play Riggs.

A datewas set – September 20, 1973 at the giant Houston Astrodome, with a winner-takes-all prize of $100,000 (around $730,000 in today's money).

Even now, over half a century later, some compare what followed to sport's equivalent of the Moon landings, with interest levels going through the roof in the weeks leading up to the match.

In a year when the news agenda was dominated by strikes, war in Vietnam and the UK joining the European Economic Community, another story came to dominate the headlines. And, rather than polarising opinion, it actually drew people together, at the same time stimulating debate about the role of women not just in sport, but society in general.

On the night itself, an estimated television audience of 50 million people in the US alone (many of them attending house parties), watched as King entered the arena as Cleopatra carried by four bare-chested muscle-bound men, with Riggs following in a rickshaw drawn by a bevy of models.

He presented her with a giant Sugar Daddy lollipop, a brand well-known in the USA. She gave him a squealing pig to symbolise his male-chauvinistic bravado. Then, with the preliminaries done, the pair went into battle for their respective sexes.

"He and I had never hit a ball against each other," recalled King in 2017, the year the film Battle of the Sexes was released, recreating the events of 1973 starring Steve Carell as Riggs and Emma Stone as King.

"I didn't know what to expect. You just don't really know until you're out there. It's really hard because usually you've played other people before, so you have a clue."

Ultimately, King chose to play Riggs at his own game. Riggs was relatively small for a tennis player, standing just 5ft 7in tall.

Rather than relying on pace and power, he had to be intelligent to compete. Knowing age was on her side, King decided to "run

OUTMATCHED!

Sugar Daddy

Billie Jean King entered the Battle of the Sexes arena as Cleopatra; Riggs as a Sugar Daddy, above

‘Our match was about social change, culturally. This one is not... but I do want Sabalenka to win’

him, run him, run him” with a game plan built around long rallies, drop shots and tactics designed to “drive him crazy”.

It worked, and she won in straight sets – 6-4 6-3 6-3.

After the final point, to King’s surprise, Riggs leapfrogged the net onto her side of the court before extending his hand and admitting, “I really underestimated you.”

Even now, it remains the most watched tennis match of all time.

In later life, Riggs, who died in 1995 aged 77, seemed to regard his leading role in the whole Battle of the Sexes story as a mixed blessing. “When I was the best player in the world, cleaning up Wimbledon, not many people paid attention,” he once said.

“But now, as an old man, everybody knows me.” He did, however, admit that losing to King in 1973 had been “the most disappointing, disheartening experience of my life”.

ON THE flip side, King has never lost sight of the importance of that victory – for her, for women in sport, and for women in the wider world. “I thought it would set us back 50 years if I didn’t win that match,” she has since said. “It would ruin the women’s tour and affect all women’s self-esteem.”

Nick Kyrgios and Aryna Sabalenka will meet in Dubai

Fast forward 50-plus years, and here we are again.

Some are calling what will happen in Dubai on December 28 harmless entertainment.

Others fear it could damage the women’s game if Sabalenka loses, especially as Kyrgios will be playing with restrictions throughout the best of three sets encounter.

Although both players will have only one serve rather than two, Sabalenka’s side of the court will be 9% smaller as a result of data put forward by the match organisers, suggesting female players move about 9% slower than their male counterparts.

As for whether King sees any parallels between Kyrgios versus Sabalenka and what happened in 1973, the former world No.1 and still regarded as once of the greatest tennis players of all time, is unequivocal.

“The only similarity is that one is a boy and one is a girl,” she has said.

“That’s it. Everything else, no. Ours was about social change, culturally, where we were in 1973. This one is not.

“I hope it’s a great match – and I want Sabalenka, obviously, to win – but it’s just not the same.”

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Matthew Upham, left; floral tribute at the beach, inset; start of Christmas Day swim in Budleigh Salterton

Tributes paid to swimmer: 'Our family is heartbroken'

BY **HELEN WILLIAM**

TRIBUTES have been paid to one of two men who are missing after a Christmas Day swim.

The family of Matthew Upham, 63, said that he was "deeply loved and forever missed".

Emergency services were called to Budleigh Salterton, in Devon, at 10.25am on Thursday after concerns for people in the sea.

A number were safely helped to the shore and checked by paramedics or taken to hospital as a precaution. But two men, aged in their 40s and 60s, were not located.

In a statement posted on Mr Upham's Instagram account, his relatives said: "Our family is heartbroken by the loss of our beloved family member Matthew Upham, who was reported missing on Christmas morning.

"Matthew is deeply loved and will be forever missed. We would like to express our sincere and heartfelt thanks to the emergency services who responded, particularly the RNLI and coastguard, for their dedication, professionalism and tireless efforts during this extremely difficult time.

"We are profoundly grateful for their compassion and support. As we grieve and support one another, we kindly ask that our family's privacy is respected. We thank everyone for their understanding, kindness and condolences."

Mr Upham, from Budleigh Salterton, owns an antiques business, Matthew Upham Antiques, in the town.

Yesterday, Devon and Cornwall Police said "both men remain missing" following the incident. It added: "Police inquiries are ongoing. A police presence remains at the scene."

Resident Julia Robb, who had been watching swimmers at the beach before the men went missing, said: "It is just awful." She said it had been a "very windy" day and that "waves were big, breaking over people".

Coastguard search and rescue helicopters and aircraft, along with police and ambulance personnel, were sent to the scene.

RNLI lifeboat crews helped recover one person from the water.

A spokesman said: "All lifeboat crew were stood down by the coastguard around 5pm, when they returned to stations."

HEALTH WARNING AS COLD ALERT REMAINS

A COLD weather health alert is in place for parts of the UK until noon today with the frosty Christmas continuing into the weekend.

The UK Health Security Agency had issued the yellow cold health alert for South West England and the west of Wales on Christmas Day.

Low temperatures are likely to impact health and social care services including "increased use of healthcare services by vulnerable people" and a "greater risk to life for vulnerable people".

The Met Office's Zoe Hutin said there was an overnight frost on Boxing Day, with highs of 6 to 7C in the South feeling closer to 4 to 5C.

It is set to be similar today and tomorrow, with drizzle where the cloud is thicker, and it will stay quite breezy.

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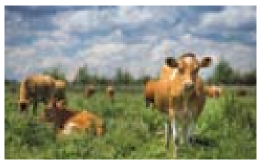

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A busy market in Moscow, while in Ukraine an army chaplain sings carol and injured woman gazes out of smashed window

So this is Christmas... but war is not over

THE festive holiday looked very different in Russia and Ukraine again this year as civilians and soldiers marked another Christmas in the shadow of drone and missile attacks.

Starkly contrasting scenes showed carefree Muscovites chatting and ambling among market stalls adorned with fairy lights. While in Ukraine, many communities were desperately trying to keep warm amid blackouts caused by relentless Kremlin attacks.

On the front line, military chaplain Mykola sings a carol to Ukrainian troops in the Donetsk region, while another image shows an injured elderly woman looking out of a smashed window in the capital Kyiv.

Diabetes drug offers hope for heart patients

BY **ELLA PICKOVER**

SCIENTISTS are assessing whether a cheap drug given to diabetes patients could be used to halt the progression of a potentially deadly condition.

A semi-retired farmer from Leicestershire was the first person to be recruited to a UK trial to check whether Metformin can help patients with abdominal aortic aneurysms.

An AAA is a balloon-like swelling of the aorta, the artery that carries blood from the heart to the abdomen.

Most aneurysms do not cause problems but there is a risk that large ones could burst, or rupture, which can be fatal.

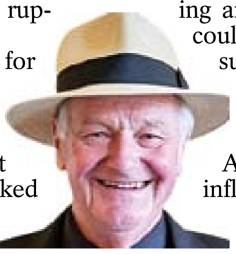
AAAs are responsible for 4,000 deaths in the UK each year. Philip Gosling, 80, was told his AAA was too small for treatment at 4cm wide. When he asked what he could do to stop it growing, he was told about Metformin.

He said: "I'm glad to be on the trial. Hopefully it will help a lot of people like me in the future."

Mr Gosling, who assists his son on the family farm, said the condition means he cannot lift heavy objects.

The study, backed by a £1.2million British Heart Foundation grant, is the largest-ever drug trial for AAA and aims to recruit 1,000 patients.

It is hoped by slowing or preventing aneurysm expansion patients could avoid major risky AAA surgery. Professor Matt Bown said: "Research in the lab indicates Metformin could be working to prevent AAA growth by blocking inflammation in the aorta – a key factor that causes AAA enlargement."



Philip Gosling is doing trial

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Audrey's list ...one dream at a time

Young Audrey at a cat cafe and, left, Taylor Swift in concert

Magical memories for determined teenager gradually losing eyesight

BY **FAYE MAYERN**

A GIRL with a rare eyesight condition is completing a "visual wish list" before she goes blind.

Audrey Tyrrell, 13, was diagnosed with Usher syndrome, a genetic disease that affects both hearing and vision, two years ago.

The condition causes deafness and an eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa, and affects about six in every 100,000 people.

Audrey, from Harwich, Essex, has already ticked off seeing pop acts Taylor Swift and Coldplay, visiting the Eiffel Tower and going to Legoland. Her wish list, which she estimates will take 10 to 20 years to complete, also includes seeing the Statue of Liberty and the Northern Lights.

Mother Tracey, 46, said: "We don't know at what age Audrey will become visually impaired. From my research, some people with Usher syndrome lose it when they are teenagers, and some in their early 30s. You don't know how much time you have, so we thought we'd act now.

"Seeing Coldplay this year was spectacular. Everyone wears these light-up bracelets, and the whole show is visually spectacular.

"Audrey also did a driving experience – except she wanted the slowest car and was very cautious."

Audrey failed her newborn hearing test at two weeks old, and doctors told Tracey and father Andrew that she had bilateral sensorineural hearing loss.

She was fitted with her first pair of tiny pink hearing aids at six weeks old, which helped Audrey to hear speech clearly.

Tracey said: "They couldn't find a cause for her deafness at that time. It was really hard because when you have a baby, you want the best for them and we didn't really know anyone else who was deaf. You grieve for the life you know they won't have."

When Audrey was older, the family were given the devastating news that she had Usher syndrome.

Tracey added: "It was really difficult. She was in year six doing her Sats. Since Usher is progressive vision loss, we didn't want her not to know so we've worked on having a really positive outlook.

"We talked with her about making a visual memories wish list as we want her to see all the things she wants to before she can't. We're slowly working our way through the list. The list gives her something positive to focus on."

Audrey, who enjoys cross-country races, ballet and ballroom dancing, has recently ticked off seeing Stonehenge and visiting a cat cafe. In 2026, she hopes to visit Rome.

ALREADY TICKED OFF THE WISHLIST...

- **Visit Stonehenge**
- Eat a pasty in Cornwall
- **See the Eiffel Tower**
- Go to Legoland
- **Do a mirror maze**
- Do an escape room
- **Go on a driving experience**
- See Taylor Swift on her Eras Tour
- **See Coldplay**
- Visit a cat cafe
- **Go to Center Parcs**
- Shower in a waterfall
- **Frozen the Musical**
- Eat at a French bakery
- **Go to a Sephora shop**
- Go to a Coldplay tribute
- **Go to the Tate Modern**

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TERMS AND CONDITIONS: [illegible]

What's your tipple?

by Matt Nixson

Put some fizz into your New Year's drinks

CHAMPAGNE has always spoken of special occasions. In fact, when it began to enjoy mass appeal in the late 19th century, it was still out of reach of the majority of people so it became popular as a New Year's Eve treat. These days it's relatively more affordable but even better, there are great-value options for every wallet and every taste.

From Italian prosecco to Spanish cava and English sparkling wine, something with a bit of fizz will help make any night a bit more special, let alone January 31.

Many fizzes, including English sparkling, are still made by the Traditional Method – grape juice is pressed, fermented and then blended. The blended wine is bottled with yeast and sugar, stopped with a crown cap and stored for a second fermentation, in which carbon dioxide is trapped as bubbles.

After ageing, the crown cap and yeast are removed, the liquid level topped up with a mixture of wine and sugar and a cork inserted. The wine is left to age before being ready to drink. This typically produces the best sparkling wines. It's not the be-all and end-all, though. Italian prosecco is made in stainless steel vats and, after all, it's beloved by millions.

Shop around now for some great New Year's deals and look out for some delicious no/low bubbly choices too for non-drinkers. Happy New Year!

WHO'S TOP OF OUR PARTY POPS?

1 Alma 4 Phos Pet Nat Chardonnay 2025 (£12, 12.5%)
This Argentinian sparkling wine made from chardonnay is great-value everyday fizz. Bright acidity and plenty of sharpish bubbles make it light and refreshing. Notes of tropical fruit, citrussy orange peel and even strawberry. Available from Tesco.

2 Bottega Pink Gold (£29.99, 11.5%)
This premium Italian sparkling rosé in a rather fetching pink bottle is perfect party fare. Made with pinot noir and glera grapes, it's subtle in the glass but boasts plenty of fresh fruit flavours: strawberry, raspberry, pears and lime to the fore. Lively on the palate with a fresh acidity and a slightly sweet finish. Available from Tesco.

3 Champagne Taittinger Brut NV (12.5%, £45)
Never disappoints, ever. The Champagne giant is a byword for quality fizz. Golden hued with a subtle, creamy mousse of bubbles and a long, slightly acidic finish. Aromas of pear and brioche and the perfect toast every time. Available from all major supermarkets, Majestic, John Lewis, Ocado, The Co-op and The Finest Bubble.

4 Whitedowns Brut NV (£19.95, 12.5%)
This sparkling wine from Surrey is a great British buy. Brightly acidic, with plenty of fizz and a bright, bold flavour. Flavours of pear, apples and citrus and a hint of summer meadows and hedgerow on the nose. Available from Denbies, Waitrose Cellar and Ocado.

5 Fiari Ribolla Gialla Sparkling, NV (£8, 11%)
A great-value alternative to prosecco from north-eastern Italy, lesser-known grape ribolla gialla produces light, gentle, dry whites with plenty of orchard fruits and floral notes. This is delicate, crisp, pale yellow and lovely. Available from The Co-op.

6 La Gioiosa Prosecco Gold (£12, 10.5%)
A nice prosecco (in a party-friendly gold bottle) that is far more flashy than the fizz inside. Pale straw yellow in the glass, with apple and hedgerow hints on the nose, this is a dry, subtle fizz with a fruity flavour and a light finish. Available from Sainsbury's.

1

2

3

4

5

6

Share your own drink-related tips with matt.nixson@reachplc.com

Downley House has a unique curved central dining area and was built in a national park

Asking price slashed at top TV property

BY **JON KING**

THE owner of a stunning house that featured on TV show Grand Designs has been forced to slash its asking price by £750,000 after it failed to sell for 18 months.

Downley House, which has turrets and five bedrooms, was listed for sale in July last year with a guide price of £5million. Owner Chris Taee decided it was time to sell up after 12 years in the property, based in the South Downs National Park, in Hampshire. The Grand Designs House of the Year show was filmed at the property in 2015.

On worst day of Christmas...

It really IS the thought that counts

BY **VICKY SHAW**

USED pyjamas, rotten fruit, and a helicopter ride for someone with vertigo are among the most “disappointing” gifts received at Christmas.

Consumer group Which? asked people about the worst present they had been given.

Among them were a rotten coconut and pineapple, while one Chelsea football fan had received a Spurs book. In all, around a fifth of people received an unwanted or unsuitable gift for Christmas 2024, according to the research.

Vertigo sufferers should avoid helicopters

Charity

When asked what they did with it, a third had kept it and will use it. One in six had kept it but would not use it.

Instead of returning or exchanging the present, 34% had disposed of it, with some re-gifted to family or friends, given to a charity shop or sold on online marketplaces.

For those who received a less than ideal gift this Christmas, many retailers extend returns policies. Which? said people will usually need to provide proof of purchase.

Some retailers do not allow refunds to credit or debit cards unless the original card holder is present.

But they may allow gift recipients to return gifts in exchange for a gift card, voucher or credit note if the item was marked as a gift when purchased, the consumer group said.

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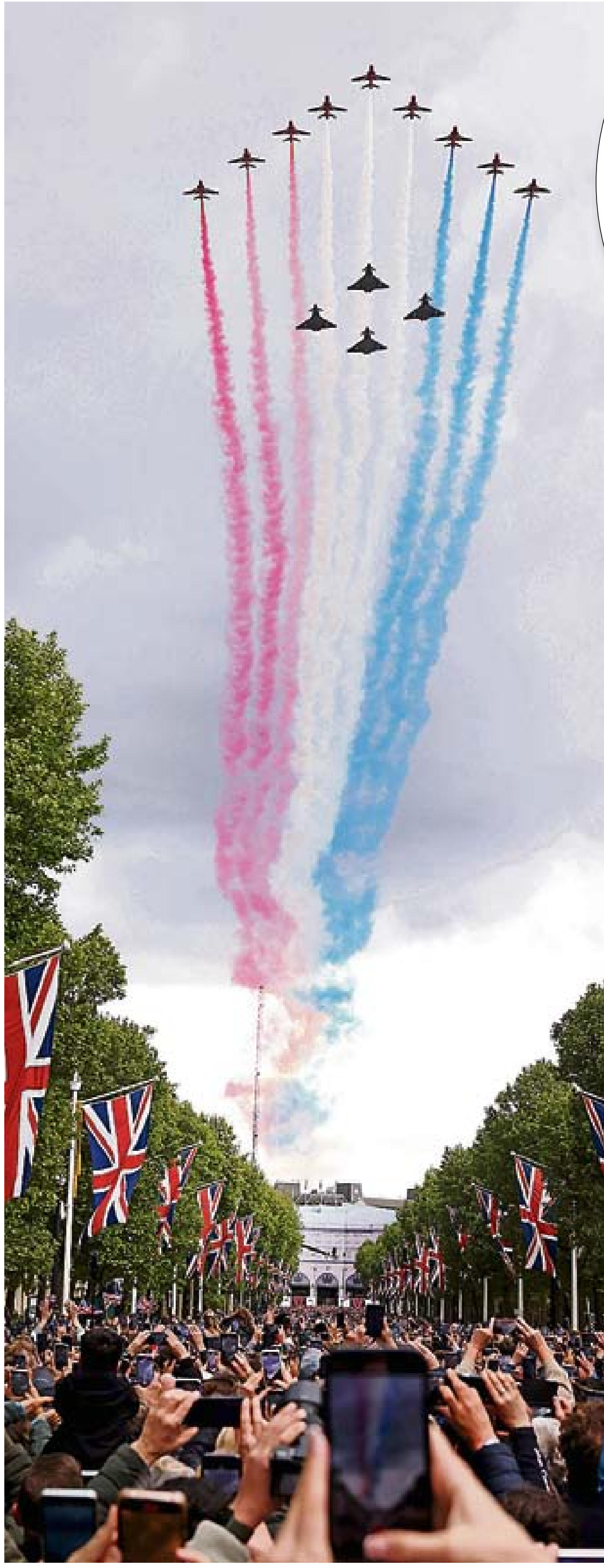
2025 in focus

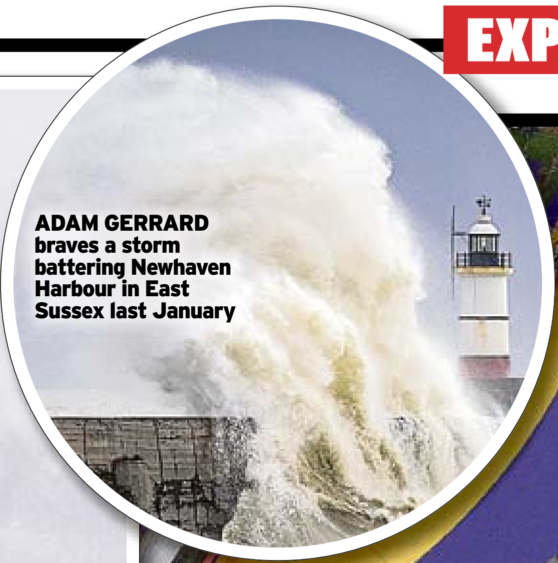
BY **FRAN BOWDEN**

THE RIGHT picture can speak 1,000 words, and here our photographers each choose one of theirs to capture the year in just ten frames.

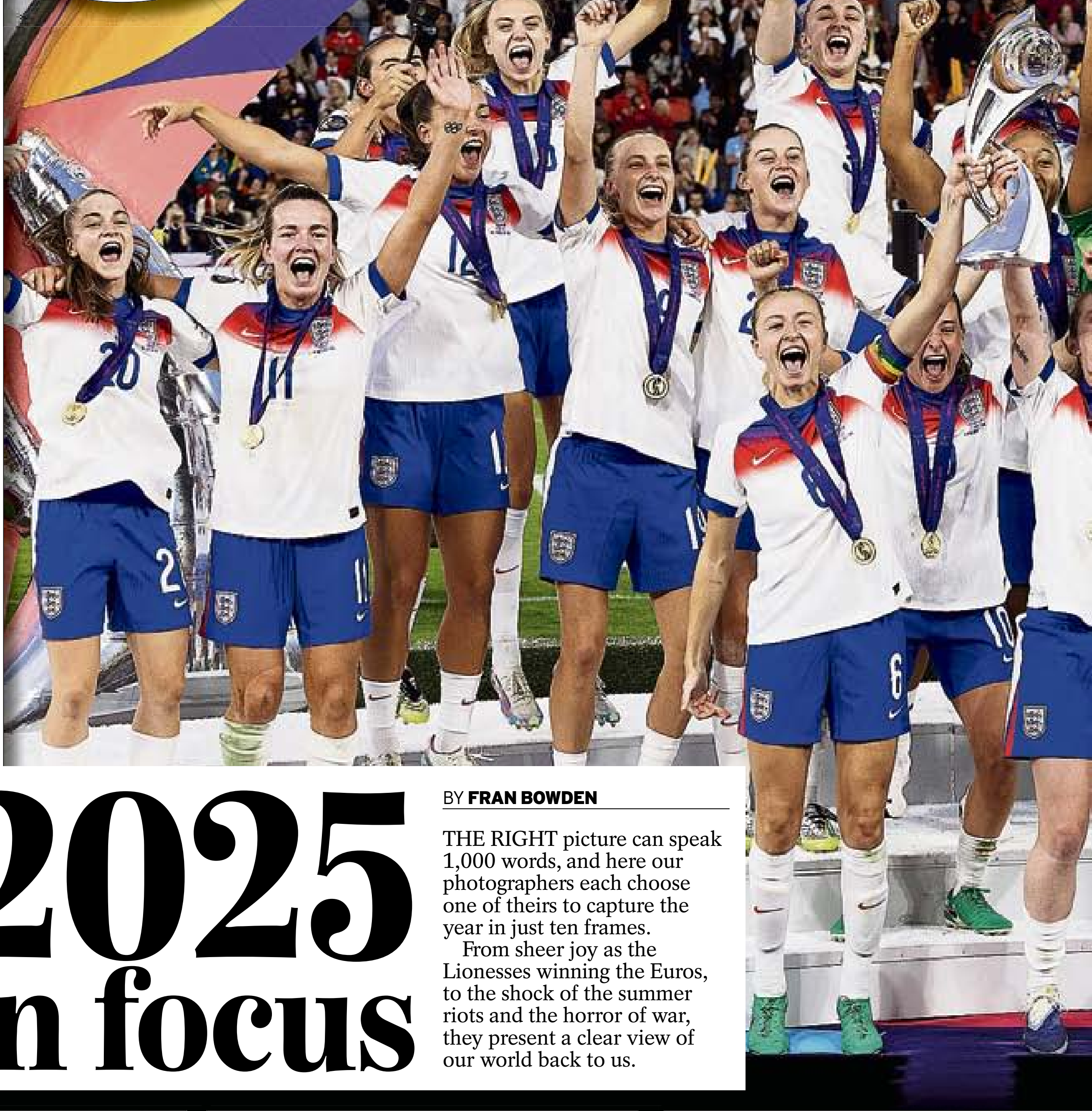
From sheer joy as the Lionesses winning the Euros, to the shock of the summer riots and the horror of war, they present a clear view of our world back to us.

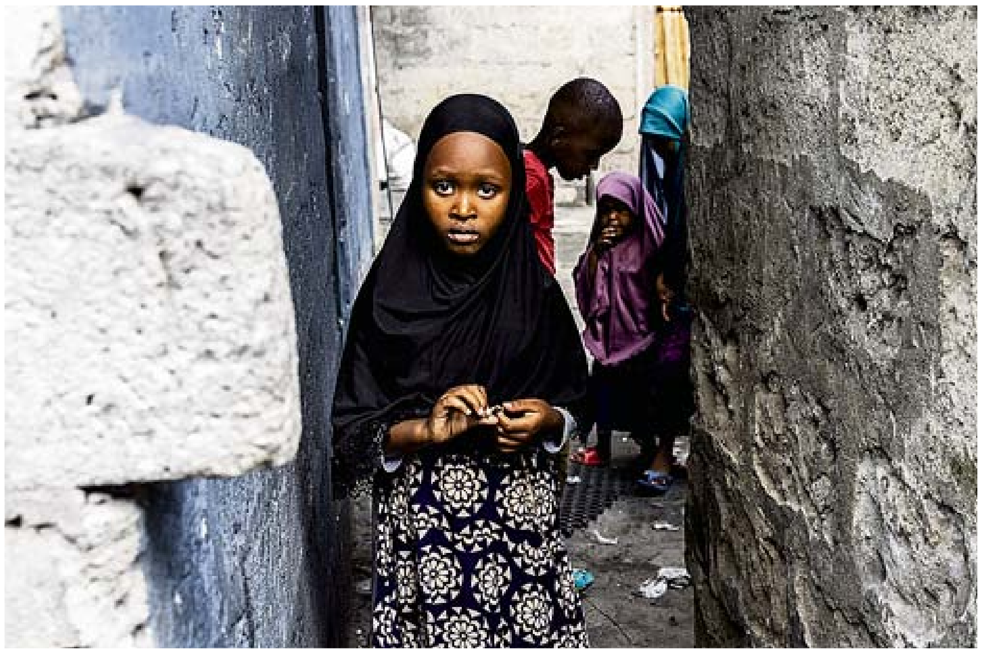


JONATHAN BUCKMASTER captured crowds in The Mall reaching for their phones as the Red Arrows make their VE Day flypast in May



ADAM GERRARD braves a storm battering Newhaven Harbour in East Sussex last January



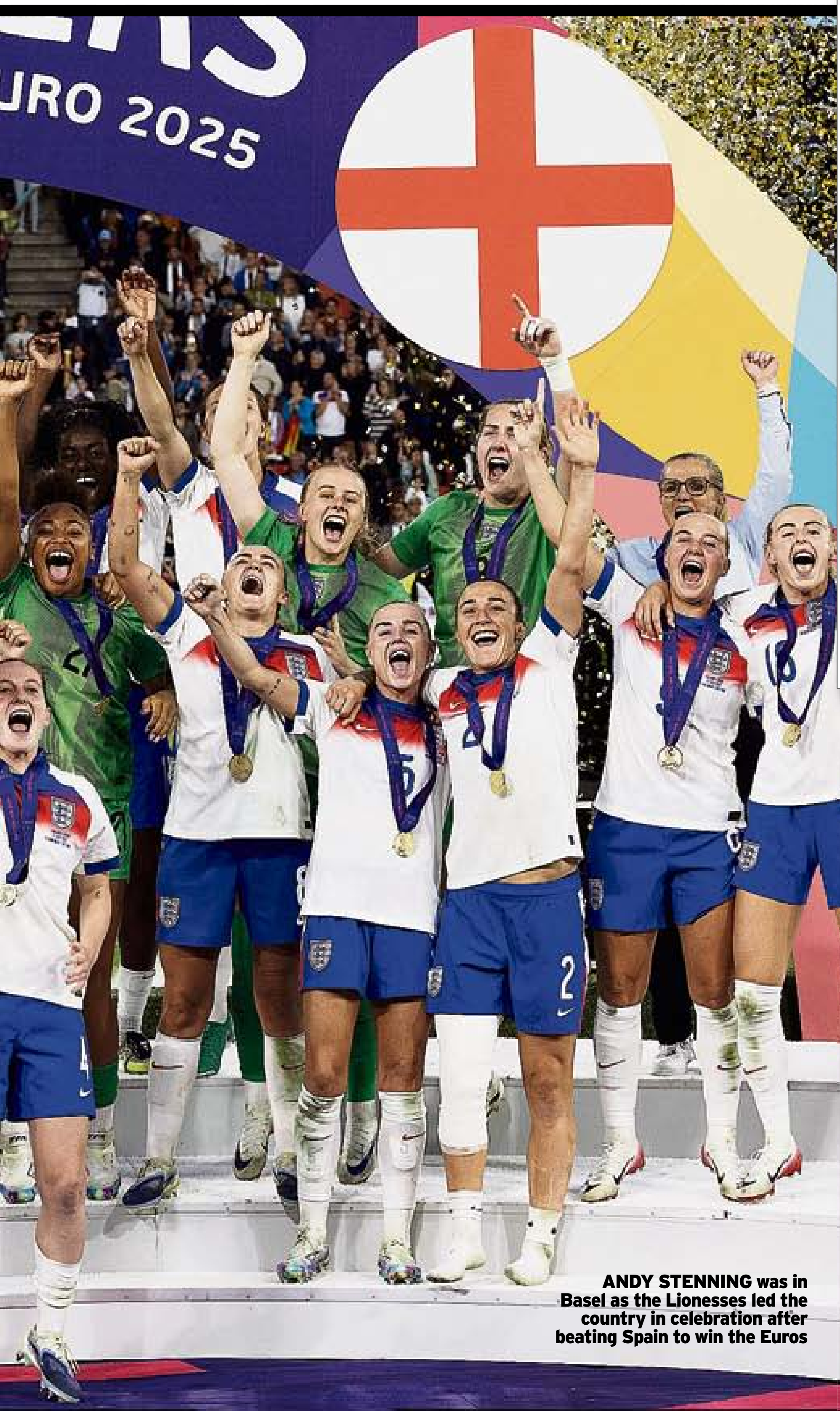


HUMPHREY NEMAR recorded a little girl's gaze as others play in a village in Tanzania last August. He was there with charity Malaria No More UK which is dedicated to wiping out the killer disease

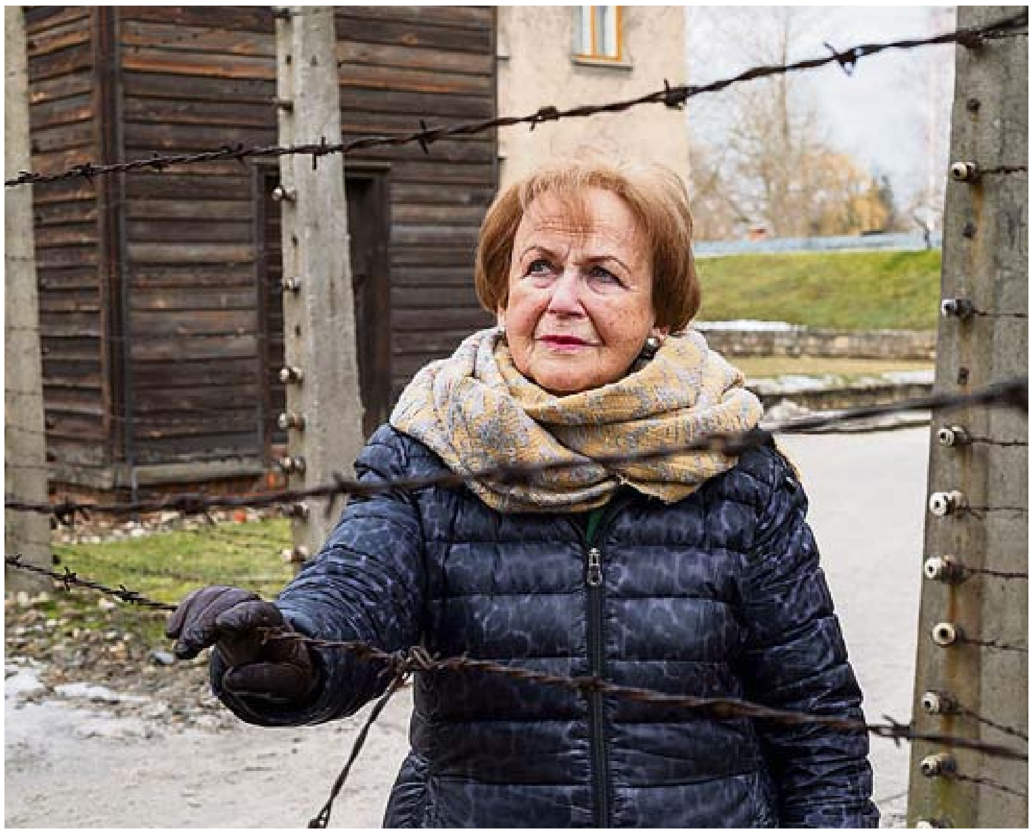
IAN VOGLER caught a moment of joy for the Princess of Wales as she visited Mull in April

PHIL HARRIS spotted Madeleine McCann peering out of a flat where he had laid low

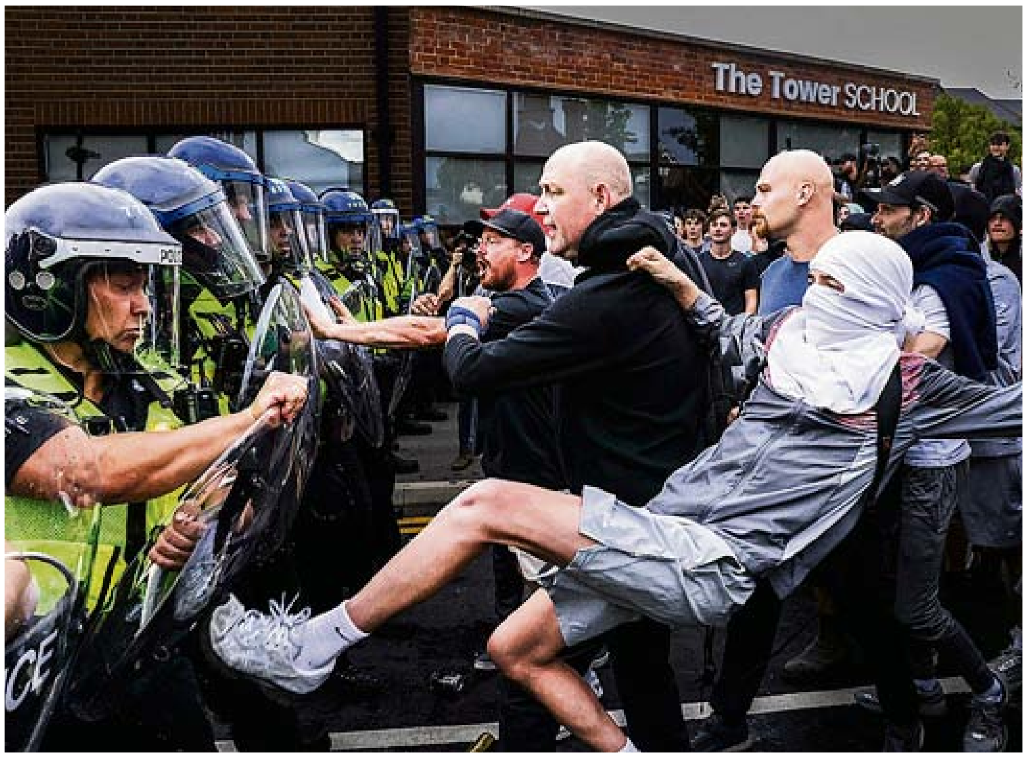
THEIR PICTURES OF THE YEAR



ANDY STENNING was in Basel as the Lionesses led the country in celebration after beating Spain to win the Euros

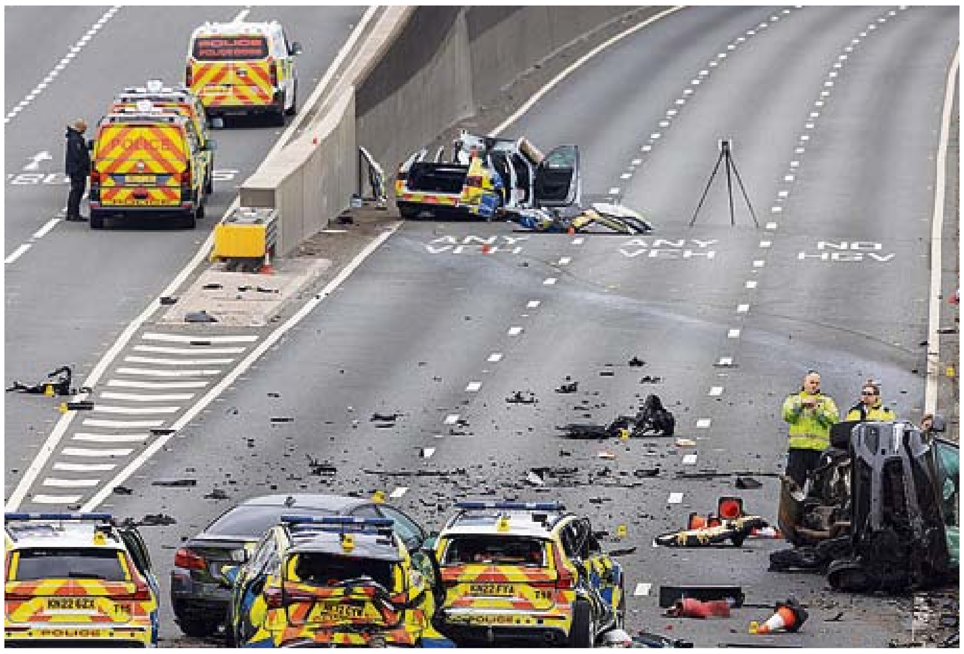


PHIL COBURN witnessed Mala Tribich's return to Auschwitz-Birkenau last January, 80 years since it was liberated. She was the only British Holocaust survivor to attend

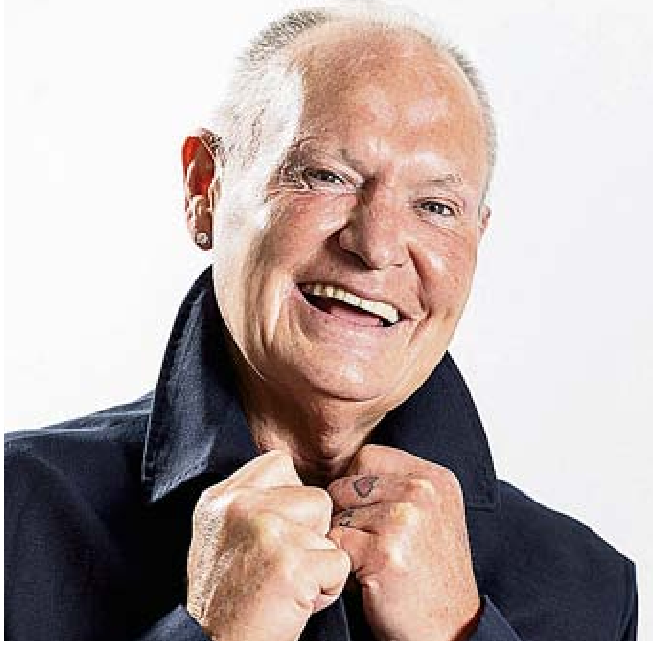


TIM MERRY caught this clash outside the Bell Hotel in Epping last July, amid a summer of protest and counter-protest over housing asylum seekers in hotels

suspect Christian Brueckner after his release from prison



ANDY COMMINS recorded the shocking aftermath of a crash on the A1 at Denton Burn, Newcastle, in April after a reported police pursuit in the early hours of the morning. Five police cars were involved



ROWAN GRIFFITHS took this perfect portrait of Gazza in May, ahead of the football legend's release of his new autobiography

30-SECOND CHALLENGE

JUST follow the instructions from left to right, starting with the number given to reach an answer at the end of the row. Set your own 30-second challenge. For the very young or arithmetically rusty, you have 30 seconds for the BEGINNER task.

For a greater challenge, try BEGINNER and INTERMEDIATE in 30 seconds. True mental gymnasts should try INTERMEDIATE and ADVANCED in 30 seconds together.

Today's answers can be found on page 39

										YOUR ANSWERS
Beginner	78	50% OF THIS	+45	6/7 OF THIS	-54	÷3	+29	3/5 OF THIS	+39	
Intermediate	176	+85	7/9 OF THIS	-47	÷12	+188	2/3 OF THIS	-78	x4	
Advanced	7	CUBE IT	+29	INCREASE BY 75%	-75	7/12 OF THIS	REVERSE THE DIGITS	-94	3/11 OF THIS	

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26
EUROMILLIONS
12 22 32 36 48 3 4
THUNDERBALL
3 7 18 23 31 5

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25
SET FOR LIFE 1 4 6 30 47 9

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24
LOTTERY 12 15 16 35 38 48 49
THUNDERBALL 6 10 11 29 33 9

THE HEALTH LOTTERY

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26
7 8 12 23 46 43

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25
19 35 41 42 45 22

The Health Lottery has raised more than £135m for health-related causes since 2011. Details at thehealthlotteryfoundation.org.uk

QUOTE OF THE DAY

> ‘We've lost our interest in engineering and manufacturing. It's a great shame.’
>
> Inventor Sir James Dyson

DO YOU HAVE A STORY OR A PHOTO?

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Fill in all the squares so that each row, each column, and each 3x3 square contain all the digits from 1 to 9

		1	4		3	8		
			6		5		1	
2		8						3
7	4		3	6			9	2
		2	9		1	3		
3	1						8	7
5				4				1
	8		5		2			
9		4	1		6	5		8

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MORE PUZZLES – P38-39 and PULLOUT

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

9	7	8	5	6	4	2	3	1
4	2	1	3	8	9	6	5	7
5	3	6	1	2	7	9	8	4
8	4	9	2	1	5	7	6	3
2	1	3	8	7	6	4	9	5
6	5	7	4	9	3	1	2	8
7	8	4	9	5	2	3	1	6
3	9	5	6	4	1	8	7	2
1	6	2	7	3	8	5	4	9

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Special Christmas cemetery visit to the deer departed

BY **JON KING**

A DEER makes the most of the peace and quiet as it walks between gravestones on Christmas Day in Canada.

Toronto's Park Lawn Cemetery is well known for its resident deer population, especially the white-tailed species, which are native to North, Central and South America.

Many of the herd enter the site through openings around its perimeter from their home in the Canadian city's King's Mill Park, one of a chain of green spaces along the Humber River leading to Lake Ontario.

Deer are often spotted foraging among the graves and have become quite used to animal lovers visiting the cemetery to catch a glimpse of them and take some photos.

Tidbits were left dotted around the frosty cemetery floor by kind-hearted visitors, providing the creatures with a festive treat.

That led to several of the deer wandering into the open and picking out the snacks from the snow-covered ground – much to the delight of onlookers.

White-tailed deer wander among the graves at Park Lawn Cemetery, in Toronto

The Saturday briefing

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER by **CAROLINE FORD**

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Is there anything you're yearning to know? Send your questions, on any subject, to the contacts given below, and we will do our best to answer them...

Q I remember in the early 1960s, an instrumental by a South American group who played harps. Who were they and can their music still be accessed today?

R Ederby, Northants

A The South American group who became internationally popular in the 1960s – led by their charismatic singer Luis Alberto del Paraná – was Los Paraguayos.

Their music was distinctive for blending traditional Paraguayan folk with other Latin genres, using instruments like the harp, guitar and bongo drums, along with unique vocal harmonies.

The group was formed in the 1950s and known as Trio Los Paraguayos – with Digno Garcoa on harp, and singers Agustin Barboza and del Paraná on guitar.

In 1953, President Federico Chavez offered artists from the country 3,200 dollars to spread Paraguayan music to Europe.

Travelling on diplomatic passports, Trio Los Paraguayos arrived in Genoa in 1954 and one of their first performances was singing "India" on Vatican Radio.

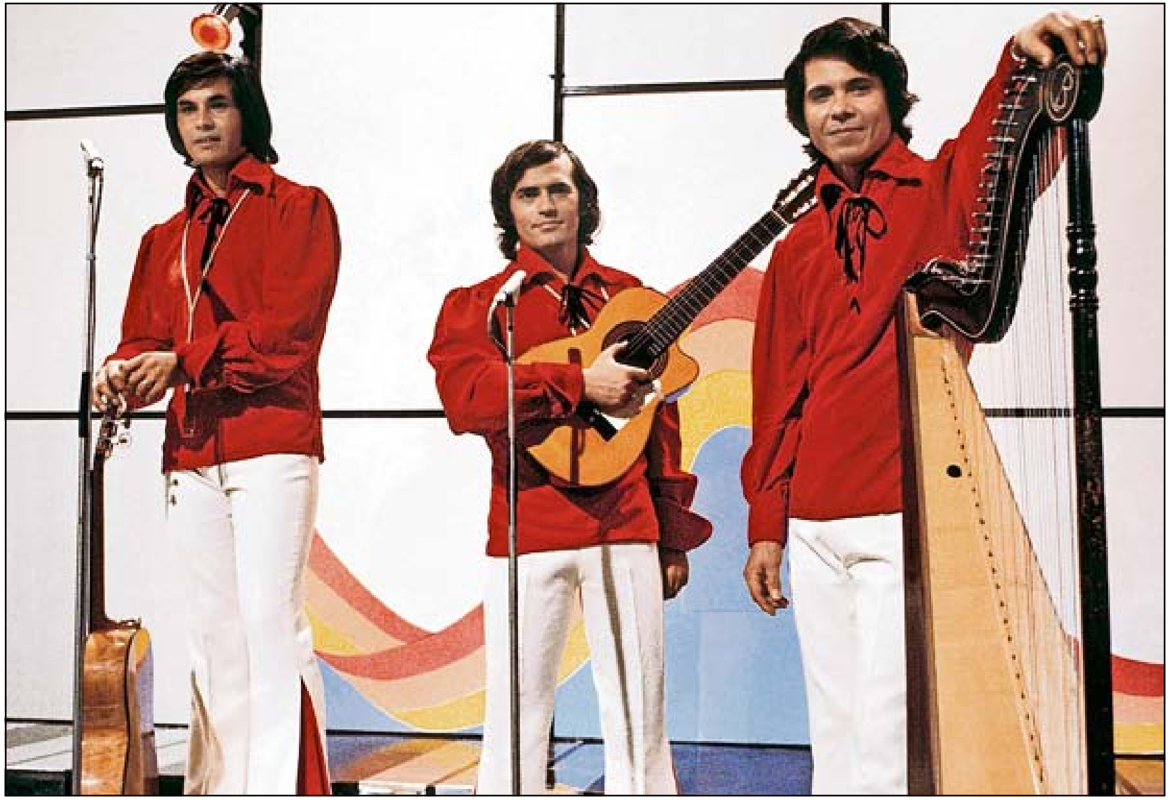
After moving to Antwerp, they signed to Philips and won a gold disc for record sales in Europe. Once the official "Cultural Mission" was over in 1956, the trio split up and del Paraná went on to found Los Paraguayos.

They released numerous successful albums, including "Famous Latin American Songs" and "Ambassador of Romance".

The group sold more than 30 million records, shared stages with major acts like The Beatles and recorded with The Rolling Stones. In 1970 they appeared on television in The Benny Hill Show.

The music of Los Paraguayos is still available through various online streaming and purchasing platforms and you can find their albums and songs on services like Apple Music, Spotify and Amazon.

Pictures: GETTY



PULLING STRINGS: Los Paraguayos first toured on diplomatic passports and, below, a clock about to strike 12

Q I am 90 now but at the age of 13 I was tasked with carrying coal from the back door to the front on New Year's Eve. As the clock struck midnight, I was let in and had to throw the coal on the fire, then everyone shook my hand and I was covered in kisses. When I asked my mother why this was, she told me it was because I had black hair. Can you explain this?

Roger Partridge, Senonnes, France

A First footing is an old tradition of welcoming in the New Year and it is deeply rooted in history and superstition.

It offers good luck and health to the home.

Possibly dating to the Viking raids on Scotland and northern England in the 8th century, first footing revolves around the arrival of the first person – the "first foot" – to enter a home after midnight on New Year's Eve, marking the start of the New Year. That person was welcomed in after midnight and offered food and drink.

It is believed the first person to enter a house on January 1 will bring good or bad luck and the luckiest first-footer of all is traditionally seen as a tall, dark-haired male – a protector against any ill fate – in contrast to the folklore of a fair-haired stranger (Viking) arriving at one's door, which signified trouble.

Significantly, it is also considered bad luck if the first-footer arrives empty handed, so symbolic gifts, such as a silver coin, shortbread or black bun, salt, coal and a drink (usually whisky) are brought to represent prosperity, food, flavour, warmth and good cheer.

It is also considered unlucky for anyone to leave the house before the first footer arrives.

The act of stepping out, even briefly, before the first footer crosses the threshold, is believed to bring misfortune.

Despite some modern adaptations, the essence of first footing – to bring luck and ensure good luck in the coming year – remains a cherished practice.

Q MPs are often addressed as The Right Honourable but can they use this title for life?

Colm Williams, Sheffield

A An MP has to be a member of the Privy Council to use the title and as membership is for life, former MPs are still entitled to use "The Right Honourable" title.

All Cabinet ministers are appointed to the Privy Council.

If MPs are not members, they are referred to as "the Honourable Member" as a courtesy during debates in the Commons but it is not a formal title used outside of parliament. MPs cease to be "The Honourable" when they leave.

The term evolved around the mid 1400s to distinguish high-ranking royal advisors (Privy counsellors), signifying they were worthy of trust and honour.

PLEASE SEND US YOUR INTRIGUING QUESTIONS ON ANY SUBJECT:

- **By email:** put "questions" in the subject line and send to caroline.ford@reachplc.com
- **By post:** to Any Questions, Daily Express, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5AP
- **Unfortunately we cannot reply individually, but we will feature the best questions on this page.**

forgotten verse

Graham Barratt from Wythenshawe, Manchester, was captivated by knights and castles as a boy and remembers a poem about a bold knight who goes on a search for a mythical land. He says the poem gave him courage to keep on going when times were hard and it would give him great joy to read it again. The poem was inspired by the quest to find the fabled lost city of gold, El Dorado in South America, that captivated European explorers for centuries.

ELDORADO

Edgar Allen Poe
(1809-1849)

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old–
This knight so bold–
And o'er his heart a shadow–
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow–
'Shadow,' said he,
'Where can it be–
This land of Eldorado?'

'Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the
Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,'
The shade replied,–
'If you seek for Eldorado.

If you can't remember the words to a favourite verse or song from yesteryear, send us a snippet and we'll do our best to find all the wonderful words.

BEACHCOMBER 108 YEARS OLD AND STILL CAROLLING...

SOME updated carols for everyone's seasonal festivities:

ONCE IN REGAL DONALD'S CITY

**Once in regal Donald's city
Stood a lowly billionaire,
Who had lost his presidential throne but
Claimed the voting wasn't fair.
Donald was that POTUS mild,
Whom the vote count had turned wild.**

**Tried his best to overturn it,
He inspired an ugly mob,
They attacked the Capitol Building,
Crying "Hoax!" and "Fake!" and "Rob!".
Donald called their actions free,
"Nothing much to do with me".
Four years later, he regained his heaven,
Winning back his presidential role,
Vowed revenge on all who had defamed
him,
Blamed him for the rioting
post-poll.
Make them pay for what
they did,
Sued the Beeb for
seven billion quid.**

AWAY IN A MANGER

**Away in a manger, no
NHS bed,
The patients are sneezing, a pain in
their head.
A 'flu epidemic fills our hospital wards,
Even mangers with beds are besieged by
sick hordes.
The doctors are striking for conditions
and pay,
The government says they
will fix it one day,
So take care at
Christmas, where'er you
may be, Or you'll join a
long queue at some
remote A&E.**

RUDOLPH, THE RED-NOSED REINDEER

**Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer
Had a very shiny nose.
Tried every skin care treatment
But they just increased his woes.
All of the reindeer doctors
Recommended nasal spray
Saying "It's just rhinitis,
This will make it go away."**

**Nothing helped until one day,
Rudolph's agent said,
"Contract here for charity,"
Sign it now if you agree."
Rudolph, the Red Nose Mascot,
Soon acquired wealth and fame,
Told all the other reindeer,
They'd no hope of such acclaim.**

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AS SEEN ON TV
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MADE IN UNITED KINGDOM

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Hit evoked a thousand memories

Chris Rea

Musician

BORN MARCH 4, 1951 – DIED DECEMBER 22, 2025, AGED 74

The talented singer-songwriter still performed despite many years of ill-health

HIS MUSIC was the soundtrack to our lives, including his much-loved festive smash hit Driving Home For Christmas. But reluctant star Chris Rea never wanted a festive hit. "I did everything I could to get them not to release that record," he said, but "Thankfully they did."

Rea was on the dole when he wrote the song – and he was banned from driving at the time.

Rea's other major chart successes included Fool (If You Think It's Over), Let's Dance and The Road To Hell.

Rea recorded 25 studio albums, two of which topped the UK Albums Chart: The Road To Hell in 1989 and its successor, Auberge, in 1991.

He was already becoming a major European star by the time he finally cracked the UK Top 10 with the single The Road To Hell (Part 2).

Other hits included I Can Hear Your Heartbeat, Stainsby Girls, Josephine, On The Beach, Tell Me There's A Heaven and Julia.

Rea also recorded a duet with Elton John, If You Were Me, and he was nominated for three Brit Awards. But his life was marred by serious illness. Diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at the age of 33, he had the organ removed, followed by liver operations and had to take 34 pills every day.

He suffered a stroke in 2016 and a year later collapsed on stage.

Rea was born in Middlesbrough to an Italian father and Irish mother, one of seven children.

The name Rea was well known locally due to his father's ice-cream factory and café where a young Rea waited tables aged 12.

He had wanted to improve the business but his ideas received no support from his father, so he left home with the idea of becoming a journalist, attending St Mary's College, Middlesbrough.

Rea didn't buy his first guitar until he was in his early 20s and even though he was left-handed, he played guitar right-handed, inspired by the legendary Delta blues musician and songwriter Charlie Patton, whose music he had heard often on the radio.

Married to his childhood sweetheart Joan Lesley, the couple had two daughters and lived in Cookham, Berkshire, where he owned Sol Mill Recording Studios.

When he was not writing and recording songs and performing, Rea enjoyed painting and historic motor racing, competing in races as a guest driver.

He owned and raced the 1964 Lotus Elan 26R.

Rea died in hospital following a short illness and leaves his wife Joan and daughters Josephine and Julia, both of whom he named hit songs after.

Sir Alec Reed

Businessman

BORN FEBRUARY 16, 1934 – DIED DECEMBER 2, 2025, AGED 91

BRITISH business executive and philanthropist Sir Alec Reed founded the employment agency Reed Group Ltd, which is one of the UK's largest private businesses.

Knighted for services to business and charity, Sir Alec was a high-profile charity donor who set up The Big Give.

Sir Alec's charity initiatives have collectively raised more than £427million, often in support of women, addiction, overseas development, education and the arts.

"Without business there would be no charity – but without charity, what's the point of business?" Sir Alec once said.

Married with three children and 11 grandchildren, Sir Alec lived with his wife in a two-bedroom house in Kensington.

Hollywood royalty's tragic end

Rob Reiner

Filmmaker

BORN MARCH 6, 1947 – DIED DECEMBER 14, 2025, AGED 78

Reiner had a string of box office hits

ROB REINER was one of Hollywood's best-known filmmakers with a string of classic hit movies to his name.

During the 1980s and 90s these included cult mockumentary This Is Spinal Tap, When Harry Met Sally, A Few Good Men, The Princess Bride, Stand By Me and Misery.

As an actor, he first became a household name on 1970s sitcom All In The Family, adapted from the British sitcom Till Death Us Do Part. He also appeared in hit movies Sleepless In Seattle, The First Wives Club and as the father of Leonardo DiCaprio's Jordan Belfort in The Wolf Of Wall Street.

He co-founded the production company Castle Rock Entertainment, which made In The Line Of Fire and City Slickers, Stephen King adaptations, The Shawshank Redemption, Dolores Claiborne, The Green Mile and the TV comedy Seinfeld.

After selling Castle Rock to Turner Broadcasting in 1993, Reiner undertook more activism and made smaller movies, explaining, "I came into this business to express myself and tell stories, not just to churn out a product." Born in New York to Jewish parents Estelle and Carl Reiner, who were themselves actors and comedians, Reiner began his career as an actor making his TV debut aged 14 on Manhunt.

Moving to California, he attended Beverly Hills High School and studied at the UCLA Film School.

Throughout the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s, he worked in theatre, film and on TV, acting, writing and directing. Away from the cameras he was a staunch liberal political campaigner, advocating for LGBTQ rights, early childhood education and environmental protection.

In 2008 he and his wife Michele co-founded the American Foundation for Equal Rights, which initiated the court challenge against California's same-sex marriage ban.

Reiner and Michele were found stabbed to death in their Los Angeles home. Their son, Nick, has been charged with two counts of first-degree murder.

Reiner is survived by their children, Romy, Nick and Jake, and by his adopted daughter Tracy from his first marriage to actress and director Penny Marshall.

Antony Price

Fashion designer

BORN MARCH 5, 1945 – DIED DECEMBER 16, 2025, AGED 80

ANTONY Price dressed the very best, from pop stars and film stars, to royalty.

The fashion designer's stellar client list included David Bowie, Duran Duran, Roxy Music, Robert Palmer, Patsy Kensit, Anjelica Huston, Jerry Hall, Diana Ross, burlesque performer Dita Von Teese and even Queen Camilla.

Best known for evening wear and suits, and for being as much an "image-maker" as a designer, Price once declared: "I'm not a fashion designer... I'm in the theatrical business", in reference to all the world-famous stars that he dressed.

Only last month Price returned to the catwalk with a show in collaboration with atelier 16Arlington, in which singer Lily Allen hit the headlines with a black velvet dress resembling the "revenge dress" of Diana, Princess of Wales. Born in Keighley in West Yorkshire, Price grew up in Selside in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and was educated at Eshton Hall School for Boys in Gargrave, North Yorkshire.

Price dressed to impress

Aged 16, Price gained entrance to Bradford School of Art specialising in womenswear fashion.

In 1965, Price entered the Royal College of Art's Fashion School in London where he completed a three-year course – two years in womenswear fashion and the final year and degree show in menswear fashion.

In his first job he cut Mick Jagger's trousers for the Rolling Stones' American Gimme Shelter tour in 1969.

In 1979 he started his own label, with shops in South Molton Street and on the King's Road.

In a star-studded career spanning six decades, Price was often referred to in the fashion industry as "the greatest designer you've never heard of."

Written by
KAREN ROCKETT

Puzzled?

PROBLEMS TO TEST YOUR BRAIN POWER

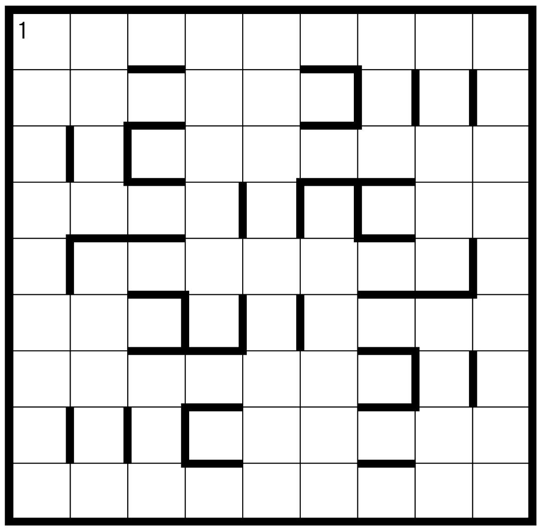
MAKE YOU VERY CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Shrinks (9)
Musical performance (7)
Superlative of good (4)
Mineral (3)
Reply (6)
All together (6)
Furiously (7)
Belonging to us (3)
Planning out (9)
Wooded valley (4)
Evident (7)

DOWN

1 Very thick paper (9)
Sever (3)
Just a single time (4)
Supernatural creature (6)
Unit of weight (5)
Accepting (9)
Shortly (4)
Insect leg (anag.) (9)
Fossil fuel (3)
A dozen (6)
Rips (5)



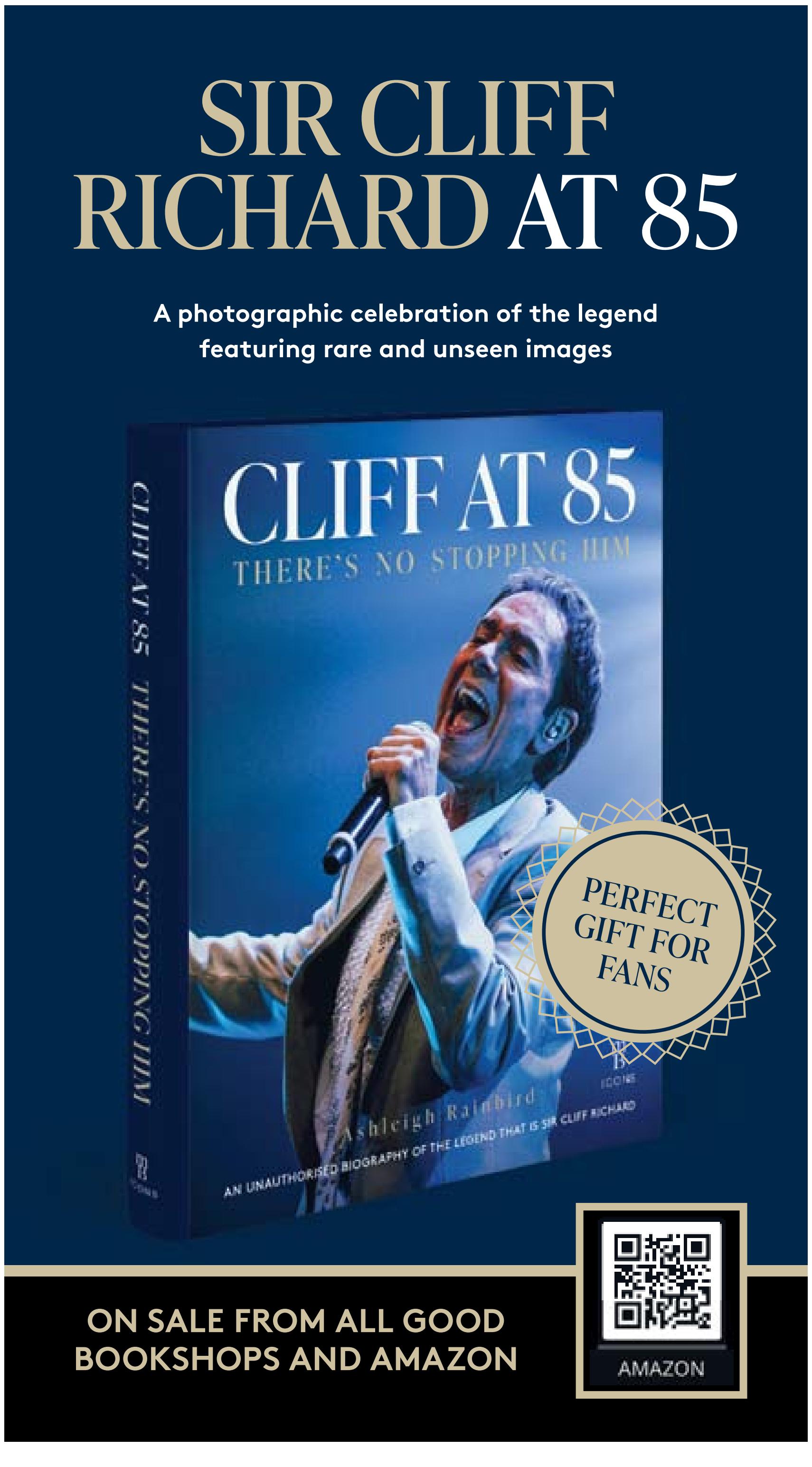
For today's solution call:
0907 181 2581

**Calls cost 80p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge.*

LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS Offspring, Virtue, Subplot, Rear, Ash, Mediate, Ian, Dear, Graphic, Lesson, Thrashing.
DOWN Oversight, Fire, Sturdy, Publishes, Ill, Noose, Gathering, Radish, Marsh, Anon, Air.

**SP: Spoke – Helpline 0333 202 3390*



SIR CLIFF RICHARD AT 85

A photographic celebration of the legend featuring rare and unseen images

ON SALE FROM ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS AND AMAZON

ALPHAPUZZLE™

A B C D E F ~~G~~ H I J K L M N O ~~P~~ Q R S T U V W X Y Z

14	11	8	14	■	7	20	20	7	20	20	2	10
5	■	11	■	7	■	5	■	26	■	12	■	11
7	15	24	7	13	2	16	■	5	4	5	16	13
10	■	20	■	13	■	11	■	17	■	16	■	5
12	2	5	16	5	■	10	2	13	1	2	13	■
11	■	■	■	10	■	19	■	■	■	7	■	20
9	2	14	2	19	11	■	3	5	7	9	11	13
5	■	7	■	■	■	23	■	18	■	■	■	24
■	21	17	24	23	7	9	■	25	2	6	5	17
16	■	23	■	17	■	11	■	7	■	10	■	23
7	1	7	17	5	■	1	5	9	16	11	8	5
9	■	2	■	7	■	5	■	5	■	9	■	11
8	11	10	5	13	7	17	22	■	21	9	7	10

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
											P	

14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
									G			

Alphapuzzle® tests logic and word power. Each grid number represents a letter. Every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter or letters – below the main grid – to start. **Solution next Saturday.**
Difficulty: 6/10 **Target:** 20 mins
Clue: Huge fireplace, it's announced.

THINKING SPACE

For up to six Extra Letter clues:
0907 181 2567*
(deduct two minutes for each clue letter heard)

Today's full solution: **0907 181 2566***
*Calls cost 80p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge.

Alternatively, for six extra letter clues direct to your mobile, text **DSXALPHA** to **64343.** Texts cost £1 plus your standard network rate.

LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS Babysit, Tawny (clue), Route, Remorse, Abeyance, Sand, Dioxin, Mister, Cage, Quotient, Menfolk, Grove, Clamp, Entreat.
DOWN Barmaid, Comic, Brute, Organza, Scenario, Soap, Thrice, Junkie, Tame, Airtight, Warrant, Erode, Yield, Retreat.

Alphapuzzle® ©2025 Acorn Editorial Ltd. All words appear in Chambers Dictionary.

CAN YOU TACKLE THE EXTRA TOUGH ULTRA ALPHAPUZZLE® IN THE SUNDAY EXPRESS EVERY WEEK?

PENTALETTA

I		A
	D	
E		N

Can you find 16 or more words containing only the five letters shown on the left? Each word must include the letter in the centre, in this case D, and must contain at least four letters, but there is no limit on the number of times you can use a letter in any word. Your list should include an eight-letter word that's muffled.

Average mark: 16 words • **Good:** 20 words
Excellent: 23 words • **Incredible:** 26 words

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION: loll, lollipop, lollop, lollops, lolls, loop, loops, loos, lops, loss, oils, olio, olios, oops, plop, plops, polio, poll, polls, polo, pool, pools, poop, poops, pops, silo, silos, sloop, sloops, slop, slops, soil, soils, solo, solos, sops, spoil, spoils, spool, spools.
The clued word was: LOLLIPOPS

SUDOKU

		8	7					
9			1			8	6	5
	4			8		7		2
	1			3	7			
	8		9		6		4	
				1			8	
3		2		4				8
7	5				8		1	
	6		2		9	4		

Fill the grid so that every column, row, and 3x3 square includes all the digits from 1 to 9.
Level: Moderate
Target: 24 mins

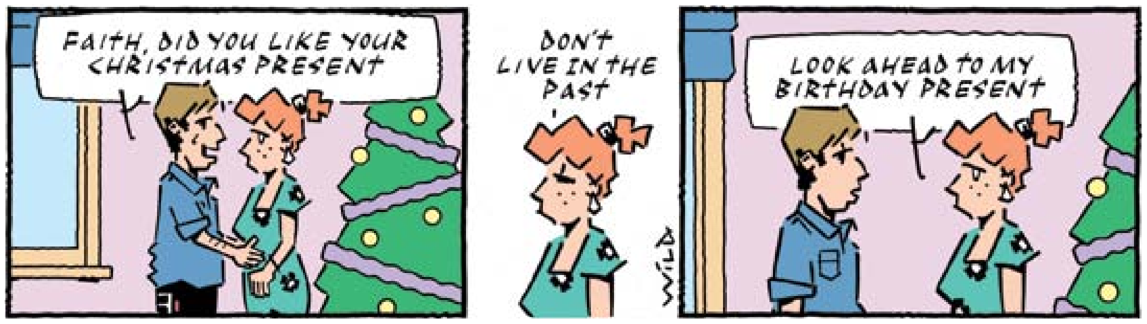
LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

9	6	3	8	1	4	7	2	5
5	7	2	6	9	3	8	4	1
8	1	4	5	7	2	6	9	3
2	5	9	3	8	1	4	6	7
3	8	7	9	4	6	1	5	2
1	4	6	7	2	5	9	3	8
7	9	5	4	3	8	2	1	6
6	2	8	1	5	9	3	7	4
4	3	1	2	6	7	5	8	9

For extra clues call:
0901 322 5603
**Calls cost 75p plus your telephone company's network access charge.*

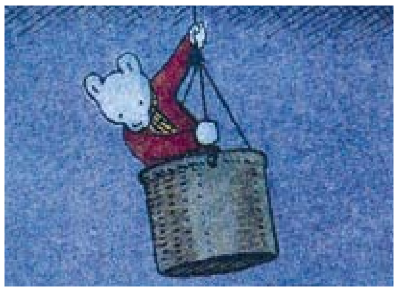
For today's full solution
call: 0907 181 2575
**Calls cost 80p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge.*

FAITH, HOPE AND SUE Lisa Wild


FAITH, DID YOU LIKE YOUR CHRISTMAS PRESENT
DON'T LIVE IN THE PAST
LOOK AHEAD TO MY BIRTHDAY PRESENT
WILD

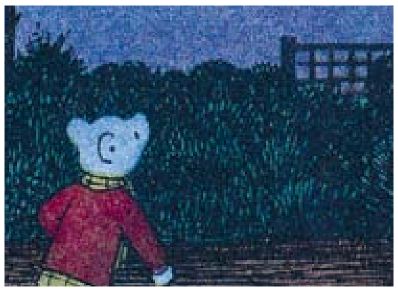
RUPERT AND THE COUGH DROP No 37

To order the New Rupert Bear Soft Toy (30cm – Rainbow Designs) at £14.99 please call 01872 562315: or order on www.classicrupertbearshop.com. UK P & P £4.95.



The little bear then holds on tight,
While he is lowered through the night.

"I'm so glad we found you, Rupert," says the clown. "If it hadn't been for you nobody would have had any presents. Now goodbye." The toy soldier pulls a lever, and Rupert drops through a hole in the cloud. "My, how dark it is," he mutters nervously. Soon the basket bumps gently and tips him out, and is swung upwards again. "This is my very own garden!" gasps Rupert, and he hurries in through the open window and is soon in bed.

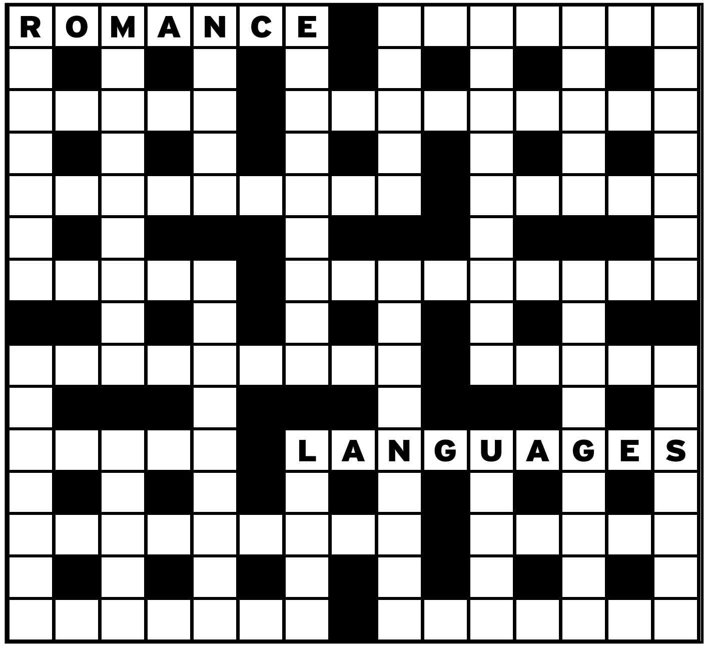


He lands quite safely, then leaps clear,
And gasps, "My own garden's here!'

THE SUNSHINE PUZZLE

The Sunshine Puzzle has been a firm favourite with readers of the Express for many years. All you need to do is find the correct home for the listed words. We have helped you by placing two. Here are the words that go into the grid:

CRUEL
ISSUE
LINKS
NYLON
PHASE
PLAIN
SERVE
SPINS
SWIFT
TILES
TUNES
UPPER
DRESSED
GUESSES
MESSING
ROCKETS
ROMANCE
SHIPPED
SYSTEMS
TORCHES
AEROPLANE
EXAMINING
EXTENSIVE
IMPATIENT
INSPECTED
INSURANCE
LANGUAGES
MESSENGER
MOUNTAINS
STRONGEST
TELEGRAPH
TREASURES



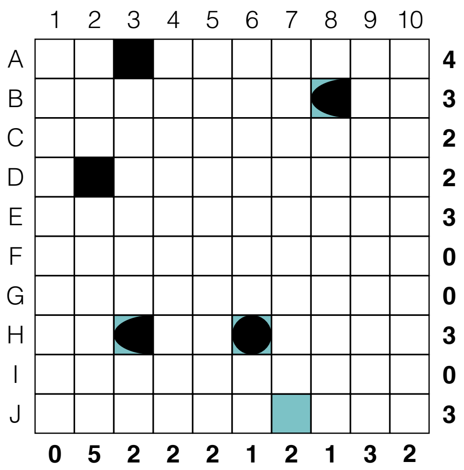
For today's solution call: **0907 181 2584**
**Calls cost 80p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge.*

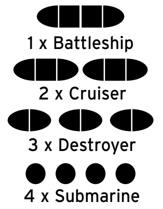
LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION
ACROSS Celesta, Trouble, Alarm, Carnation, Snap, Naval, Flab, Soppy, Chocolate, Correlate, Extra, Tier, Raven, Nave, Anatomise, Orate, Sincere, Topless. **DOWN** Chassis, Llama, Same, Archaic, Tornado, Oval, Brilliant, Ennoble, Hyper, Sober, Porcelain, Hot, Cutlass, Avarice, Element, Ageless, Apace, Lope, Pomp.

THE DAILY EXPRESS 30-SECOND CHALLENGE

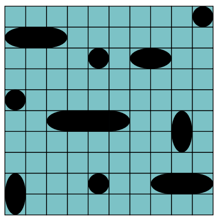
TODAY'S ANSWERS: BEGINNER = 60; INTERMEDIATE = 224; ADVANCED = 147.

BATTLESHIPS



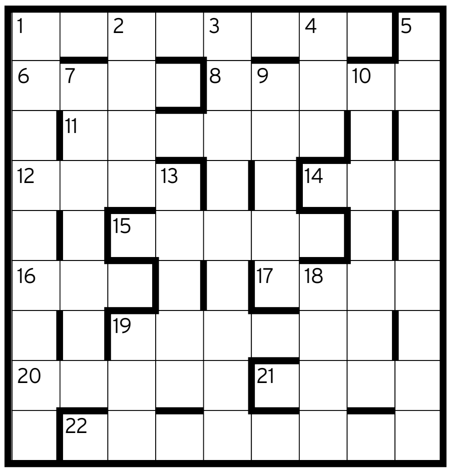


LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION



FIND where the fleet of ships shown is hidden in the grid. The numbers to the right of and below the grid indicate how many of the squares in that row are filled in with ships or parts of ships. The ships do not touch each other, even diagonally. Some squares have been filled in to start you off.

SMALL CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Building material (8)
6 Particle (4)
8 Each (5)
11 From _ With Love, 1963 film (6)
12 Suspend (4)
14 Abbreviation for the UK's time zone (1,1,1)
15 Genre of jazz (5)
16 Use a spade (3)
17 Stimulus (4)
19 Bowman (6)
20 Concur (5)
21 Container for flowers (4)
22 Quantifies (8)

DOWN
1 Large church (9)
2 Part of speech (4)
3 Supplies (9)
4 Brewed beverage (3)
5 Yes mister (anag.) (9)
7 Exchanging (7)
9 Grape plants (5)
10 Whispers (7)
13 Look fiercely (5)
18 Fruit (4)
19 Sitcom, _ You Being Served? (3)

For today's solution call: **0907 181 2583**
**Calls cost 80p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge.*

LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION
ACROSS 1 Snapshot, 6 Cain, 8 Maple, 11 Try out, 12 Rays, 14 Woe, 15 Balti, 16 Cow, 17 Seer, 19 Scents, 20 Osier, 21 Cost, 22 Presence.
DOWN 1 Scarecrow, 2 Airy, 3 Smoulders, 4 Opt, 5 Penetrate, 7 At a loss, 9 Aunts, 10 Lioness, 13 Sauce, 18 Eton, 19 Sir.

TARGET

A	L	L
E	P	N
T	A	B

HOW many words of four letters or more can you make from the letters shown here? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each must contain the centre letter and there must be at least one nine-letter word. No plurals. Verb forms ending in "s" permitted.

TODAY'S TARGET
Good 18; **very good** 27; **excellent** 36 (or more). **Solution next Saturday.**

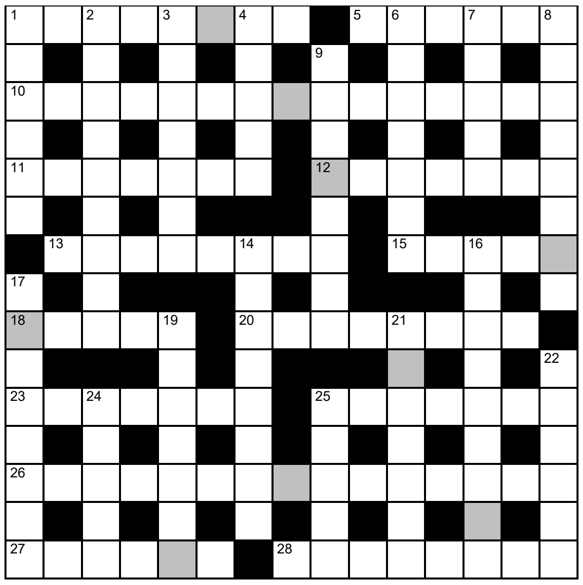
LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION
ding, dingo, doing, dong, donging, doning, dour, droning, drug, dugong, dung, dunno, during, gird, gourd, grid, grind, ground, **GROUNDING**, nudging, nurd, rind, round, rounding, undo, undoing, ungird

Call **0907 181 2586** for today's Target solution
**Calls cost 80p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge. All puzzles use The Chambers Dictionary*

CRUSADER CROSSWORD

WIN £100

FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN £100 CASH read down the letters in the highlighted squares to reveal the mystery word



ACROSS
1 General means to find theatre district (8)
5 Restaurant first introduced to brother (6)
10 Confused all night, get into London Underground station (7,4,4)
11 Russian not starting from Spain or Portugal (7)
12 Trendy former partner at performance, not quite accurate (7)
13 For Gaul, e.g., an adapted system of communication (8)
15 South-west member finding bees (5)
18 Aviator – one involved in secret plan (5)
20 A letter I corrected, being able to read and write (8)
23 Popular part about first of hooligans I restrain (7)
25 Calm place found by a feline, English (7)
26 Those in authority – both saw pet there, distressed (3,6,4,2)
27 Injured deer is to live (6)
28 Campaigner, more vulgar, going round South Africa (8)

DOWN
1 Robber barred it, reportedly (6)
2 Alert, being shown the dance (2,3,4)
3 Forcing doctor in Gateshead to collect four (7)
4 Gas held by familiar gondolier (5)
6 One left large loch with bug (7)
7 It upset a royal with a diadem (5)
8 Noticeable one is seen with me for extra working hours (8)
9 Conscientious woman, 51, appearing with man (8)
14 Everything over the top connected to journalist that's assigned (8)
16 A teetotal ringleader having behaved when drawn (9)
17 Runner showing second picture with hesitation (8)
19 Paper, a bit old, disintegrating (7)
21 Gets to engineers with pains (7)
22 Film set in Rome, possibly, showing shooting star (6)
24 Cures, say, for parts of feet (5)
25 Difficult question for exhibitionist (5)

TO ENTER: Call **0904 161 3700** (calls cost £1.50 plus your telephone company's network access charge) and leave your answer and details, or text **DXCRUS** followed by a space, your answer, name and address details to **88833** (texts cost £1.50 plus your standard network rate). Lines close at midnight tonight. Or send your grid containing the answer in the shaded squares by posting it to: Crusader Crossword, December 27, PO Box 8694, Derby DE1 9TW. Entries must be postmarked by December 29 at the latest. For any postal enquiries, call helpline number. An extra day is given for postal entries during bank holidays. SP: Spoke – 0333 202 3390.

● ***One weekly winner will be the first random correct entry drawn from all entry routes after the closing date of midnight tonight. Competition runs Sunday to Saturday. The Editor's decision is final.***

NEED HELP? Call **0904 161 1609** for 5 extra clues! Calls cost £1.50 plus your telephone company's network access charge.

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7-13 December: S McCabe, Tyne and Wear
Please allow 30 days for prizes to arrive

LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION
ACROSS 1 Sapphire, 5 Abroad, 10 Insect repellent, 11 Trivial, 12 Titanic, 13 Disgrace, 15 Drone, 18 Attic, 20 Resisted, 23 Ironing, 25 Example, 26 Throw in the towel, 27 Resign, 28 Property.
DOWN 1 Shirty, 2 Pessimist, 3 Hacking, 4 Rural, 6 Belated, 7 Ocean, 8 Detached, 9 Spotless, 14 Arrogant, 16 Overpower, 17 Canister, 19 Chinwag, 21 Start-up, 22 Really, 24 Ogres, 25 Ether. **Prizeword:** Ordinary.

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THE ALPHABEATER

CAN you crack the Alphabeater? It's a tough twist on our popular Alphapuzzle, designed to stretch your mental muscles to the limit. Each grid number below represents a letter or a black square. As in Alphapuzzle, every letter of the alphabet is used. But now you have to complete the grid too! Use the given letters and the given black squares below the main grid to start.

To add to the fiendish fun, Alphabeater is 'rotationally symmetrical'. In other words the grid is the same if you turn the page upside down. So, for example if there is a six-letter word Across which starts in the top left corner, there will be a corresponding six-letter word Across which ends in the bottom right corner square. Every black square has a symmetrical 'twin' but the 'twin' may not always share the same number. This can help identify other black squares. Of course if the centre square is black it has no corresponding 'twin'. Solution next Saturday.

A ~~**B**~~	24	10	5	6	29	30	35	27	27	35	17	3	31
C D	27	6	38	32	30	3	20	16	23	17	33	18	38
E F	35	3	15	35	26	6	10	36	6	27	16	22	6
G H	22	34	1	32	34	1	15	27	37	37	26	4	22
I J	34	23	34	4	18	35	22	34	1	8	35	13	34
K L	29	5	2	10	26	28	11	4	23	18	9	5	1
M N	7	33	35	27	21	6	24	8	35	1	14	3	36
O ~~**P**~~	16	20	16	3	5	19	10	6	5	20	32	19	37
Q R	13	16	13	34	40	16	13	36	26	23	34	20	12
S T	32	15	11	4	23	36	3	7	34	13	13	34	27
U V	39	35	14	34	13	36	29	36	23	34	29	10	38
~~**W**~~ **X**	35	10	20	1	26	38	18	37	40	1	35	35	21
Y Z	28	37	32	6	25	34	12	35	15	39	4	5	21

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
			■	■							B					W			
21	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**	**31**	**32**	**33**	**34**	**35**	**36**	**37**	**38**	**39**	**40**
																			P

Target Time: 34 minutes

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Extra letter clues
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Today's full solution
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Extra letter clues
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*Calls cost 80p per minute plus your telephone company's network access charge.
Alternatively, for six Extra Letter clues direct to your mobile, text **DSXBEAT** to **64343.**
Texts cost £1 plus your standard network rate.

LAST SATURDAY'S SOLUTION Black squares: 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 17, 18, 23, 27, 29, 35, 40. **Across:** Fully, Equipped, Inlet, Irate, Bishopric, Ilk, Axed, King, Jaw, Showcased, Asset, Nexus, Cardigan, Gazed. **Down:** Urn, Sham, Shawls, Leech, Strip, Squirm, Jovial, Civic, Arena, Aligns, Left, Use.

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TRAVEL GARDENING & FOOD

43 Travel
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TRAVEL EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS

Edited by **JULIE DELAHAYE**

SMART CHOICE
Weekend plans

Cam back soon?

On a 48-hour trip to Cambridge, HOLLY FLEET gets her head turned by fresh sights in the historic city

Cambridge is no hidden gem, but in recent years it has had a boost of interest from Brits looking for a smart staycation thanks to its history, breathtaking buildings and standout food and drink scene. Curious about the fuss, I booked a 48-hour escape to the leafy city.

If you're looking for an enchanting way to explore Cambridge's stunning college architecture, punting is the obvious way to go.

A friendly guide from Let's Go Punting accompanied me, and handed me a glass of champagne upon arrival.

I got lucky with the weather and we meandered past picturesque colleges and ivy-covered bridges.

But it would still be pure magic, now, on a chilly day, wrapped in a blanket, sipping hot chocolate while drifting under the Bridge of Sighs as the sun sets.

EXPLORE
City streets

Back on dry land, I walked a short distance to a local beer house, The Pint Shop. I shied away from the pints and went for a glass of rosé, with a fabulous chicken Caesar salad to line my stomach before an early night.

My accommodation for the weekend was the ultra-sleek Clayton Hotel, located just a short stroll from the railway station. It's the kind of place that instantly makes you forget the stress of the daily grind.

The beautiful glass building is filled with calming neutrals, attentive staff, and the comfiest mattress I have ever laid on, giving my long-suffering back much-needed relief.

I got the perfect night's sleep, with the bonus of essentials from luxury cosmetics brand Rituals to hand. The hotel's breakfast buffet provides early risers with a decent start, and features handmade granola, smoothies, artisanal breads, cheeses and more.

For those who prefer a slower start (myself included), you can hit the snooze button until just before 10am and grab a croissant before venturing out into the city.

There's endless greenery and culture to be found. A highlight of my second day was the Cambridge University Botanic Garden – an oasis of calm in the heart of the city. With its sweeping lawns, glasshouses and rare, tropical plants, it's a dream for anyone, like me, who loves nature and photography.

It's home to a collection of more than 8,000 plant species from all over the world, which are used for teaching and research.

After my nature fix, I treated myself to a delicious lobster lunch with crispy French fries at the North Star Restaurant. While sipping on an ice-cold Chablis, I got to know the maître d' who shared how he left London for the spires of Cambridge – and has never looked back.

After just a few hours in the city, it was painfully clear why.

I finished my meal with a mighty sticky toffee pudding, then joined a two-hour private walking tour that showcased the stunning architecture to be found around every corner. And it certainly meant I walked off my pudding.

> ***'Stories of secret rivalries and royal visits'***

DREAM STAY
Room at the Clayton

NATURE FIX
Botanic Gardens

PUNT HUNT
Holly on the Cam

My guide brought Cambridge's history to life with engaging stories of secret college rivalries, royal visits, and famous alumni who once walked these cobbled streets... Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Sylvia Plath, Alan Turing, David Attenborough – endless big names and brains inspired by these beautiful surroundings.

Getting a close look at King's College Chapel – founded in 1441, and giving off serious Hogwarts vibes – I learned about its traditions and its special place in our history.

Back at the hotel for dinner at its Tamburlaine Restaurant, I knew I had only just begun to explore the charm of Cambridge – although my feet were protesting. Next time, I'll be sure to wear trainers for a walking tour, instead of suede heeled boots. At least the pork chop I ordered distracted me from the ache in my soles.

After living happily in London for nearly two decades, I surprised myself by browsing Rightmove and favouriting properties in a different area.

While prices are nowhere near what you'd find in the North, they are more reasonable than what I pay. My neighbourhood seems to experience rising prices every minute, despite resembling an abandoned town from a Western, where dust blows down the road.

Perhaps it's time to consider relocating to a city where magic still feels possible? Or at least book a return visit. Whether it's drifting along the Cam or walking through the gardens, it's impossible not to fall in love with the place.

BOOK IT

Rooms at the Clayton Hotel Cambridge start from £131 based on two adults sharing a double room. Book at *claytonhotels.com*

MORE INFO

visitcambridge.org

Coventry makes the perfect Cathedral city

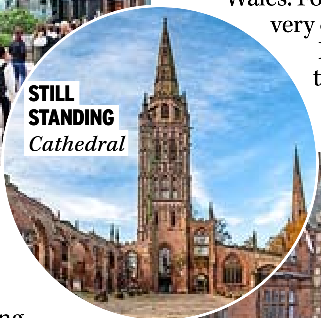
RUINS *Casualty of the war*

By **ALYCIA MCNAMARA**

Having grown up in the Midlands, I'm always telling people how good the area is, but they never believe me. It's a place that seems forgotten about, with neither northerners or southerners seemingly too bothered about what they can find there. But they should be.

The Midlands has a strong sense of heritage, shaped by its industrial past, and it's home to several of the UK's most exciting cities. Nottingham and Leicester each have their own unique characters, but Coventry stands out to me as a city bursting full of life, history and warmth.

VIBRANT *Shopping area*



STILL STANDING *Cathedral*

Thanks to Coventry University's student population, the centre is lively throughout the day. On a recent weekday visit, even in the chilly morning air, the city felt inviting and buzzing. Driving in, it felt bigger than I remembered. From its busy roads, Coventry presents a skyline where modern and historic elements blend, creating an atmosphere that feels both grounded and forward-looking.

History is woven through the streets of a city that helped inspire George Eliot to write Middlemarch. Its most famous landmark is the cathedral, which was heavily bombed during the Second World War.

Today, the ruins remain a solemn and beautiful space, in stark relief to the attached modern university building. Coventry defended itself during the English Civil War, and in 1940 it endured the devastating Luftwaffe raid known as Moonlight Sonata, which killed hundreds and destroyed thousands of homes along with parts of the cathedral.

Today, Coventry offers an impressive selection of shops, including around 240 independents. Local shop owners told me it's a friendly city where people always want to stop and talk, or help. And while eating lunch, I recognised the slower pace of life people have in the city, something I enjoyed.

It's a place where there's enough to do, but people aren't in a rush. To me, Coventry seems to have the perfect blend of city life and a relaxing atmosphere too.

One of the many excellent attractions is the Coventry Transport Museum, which is home to the largest collection of British-made cars, motorcycles, and bicycles in the world. Its futuristic exterior makes it an attraction even before stepping inside.

A key advantage the city has is its central location. Coventry is accessible from both the North and South, and is even relatively close to Wales. For a weekend or a day trip, it is very convenient.

I moved away from the Midlands to the big city of London, which is all too often seen as the place to be.

HISTORY *Alycia at Council House*

But heading back to the Midlands, I realised you can't beat the friendly charm the area has to offer. Coventry has it in spades.

I'll be back to spend a slow day wandering around its friendly streets soon. The city offers a warm and homely feel that you just won't find in the capital.

ALL ABOARD *Grapevine train full of Christmas decorations*

Put Lone Star State on your must-see list

Covering off three cities in one trip is no mean feat, but NATALIE KING *says she'd go back to Texas to give any one of Dallas, Fort Worth and Grapevine another go*

Texas has long been at the top of my bucket list, and I finally had the chance not only to visit the Lone Star State, but to tick off three major cities in the process.

After a pleasant enough flight with American Airlines, which flies direct from Heathrow to Dallas Fort Worth, I arrived mid-afternoon ready to dump my suitcase and start exploring.

Our first stop was a city I'd actually not heard of before: Grapevine. While it's close to DFW – just a 10-minute train journey gets you to Main Street –it's often overlooked by Brits.

A sign informs me the city is the "Christmas Capital of Texas", which I discover is not just a marketing gimmick, but a title actually conferred on them by the Texan Senate.

As someone whose guilty pleasure is movies about American small towns, Grapevine was the ideal place to stay. From the boutiques selling vintage cowboy boots to the pie shop which has apparently been crowned the fifth best in the US, the town was full of charm.

Of course, if you're coming to the States, you'll no doubt want to do some shopping. As well as the independent shops downtown, Grapevine

AMAZING YET TERRIFYING *Rodeo skills up close*

> **'Grapevine a city full of charm with US's fifth best pie shop'**

FESTIVE *The city is is the Christmas capital of Texas*

CHIC *Rooftop pool at Dallas hotel*

REFLECTION *Dallas skyline lit up at night*

Mills, a sprawling modern mall, is worth a visit. It has a mixture of outlets and popular brands, so there are plenty of bargains to be found. Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus Last Call are good for finding designer brands with deep discounts.

Next it was time to head to Dallas itself. As we drove down a huge multi-lane highway alongside gigantic pick-up trucks, the Dallas skyline full of shiny skyscrapers came into view. Our accommodation, the HALL Arts Hotel Dallas, was similarly stylish.

This five-star hotel had crisp, neutral decor, complemented by carefully curated modern art pieces. As we arrived, they were also adding some chic monotone Christmas decorations made out of thousands of baubles. With a rooftop pool overlooking Dallas, it was an incredible place to stay.

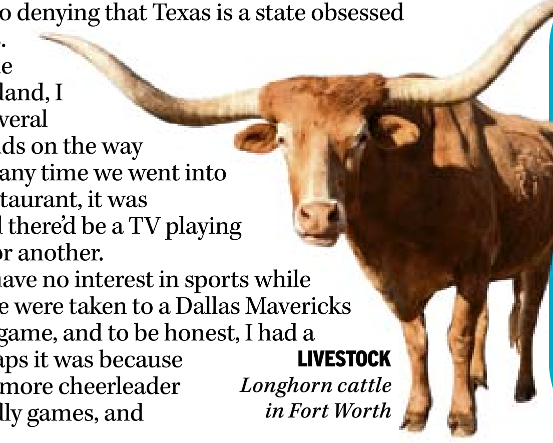
As we were staying in the city's Arts District, it made sense to explore some of its cultural attractions. Firstly, the Nasher Sculpture Centre, a serene gallery and garden full of contemporary sculptures, which feels like an oasis in the middle of the bustling Dallas streets.

We then headed to the Dallas Museum of Art, a winding maze of galleries with artworks and artefacts from ancient to modern. One of the largest art museums in the US, we saw pieces by Jackson Pollock, Rothko, and Edward Hopper, yet hardly scratched the surface of all the artworks on display.

The Bishop Arts District is also worth a visit if you like discovering up and coming artists. This neighbourhood is packed with quirky, independent shops selling prints, as well as vintage clothes, unusual antiques, and vinyl records. In addition to the colourful shops, you'll find some of the city's coolest restaurants and arty dive bars.

There's no denying that Texas is a state obsessed with sports. As the plane came in to land, I counted several football fields on the way down, and any time we went into a bar or restaurant, it was guaranteed there'd be a TV playing one game or another.

While I have no interest in sports while at home, we were taken to a Dallas Mavericks basketball game, and to be honest, I had a blast. Perhaps it was because there were more cheerleader routines, silly games, and adverts than actual sport being played, but the atmosphere was incredible.



LIVESTOCK *Longhorn cattle in Fort Worth*

SLAM DUNK *Dallas Mavericks basketball game*

PARTY TIME *Friday night at Billy Bob's*

Next on the itinerary was Fort Worth, and until we arrived, I didn't know much about this city other than it had a long association with cowboys.

Sitting in a car about the size of my living room, the first thing I saw was a group of men in cowboy hats – not an uncommon sight. A man even opened the hotel door for me, tipping his hat when I thanked him.

BOOT PICKER *Shopping for the perfect pair at Forth Worth Stockyards*

The historic Fort Worth Stockyards are a major draw for tourists. Once a thriving livestock market, the buildings have since been turned into cowboy-themed souvenir shops and restaurants. One tradition that has stood the test of time is the cattle drive. Twice a day, the crowds are pushed back on to the pavement and a herd of Texas Longhorns are skillfully guided down the street by cowboys on horseback.

Of course, it wasn't just cowboys who had these rough jobs. The National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame honours the women of the American West who lived through challenging times. There are displays and artefacts from cowgirl boots to pistols, as well as the chance to go on a bucking bronco.

For our final night in Fort Worth, there was only one place to go, and that was Billy Bob's – the world's largest honky tonk. A gigantic building that's a cross between a music venue, pool hall, restaurant, and amusement arcade, Billy Bob's was packed with people and lit with neon signs, giving it a real party vibe. Sadly, with a plane to catch the next day, I had to call it a night after one Ranch Water (Tequila Blanco, sparkling water, and lime – trust me, it's the new G&T), although the venue is open until 2am at weekends for those who can handle it.

So, which was my favourite of the three cities? What I loved about visiting these places in a short amount of time is that I felt I saw many different sides to Texas in one trip. There was the cosy and homely in Grapevine, the arty and inventive side in Dallas, and the old traditions of cowboy (and cowgirl) culture in Fort Worth.

I'd gladly hop on a plane and go back to any of them, but Grapevine definitely stood out as a place to revisit, especially for a family trip. Perhaps I was swayed by the Christmas decorations and friendly, small town vibe. Or maybe I'm regretting not getting a slice of the fifth best pie in the US.

CULTURE *The National Cowgirl Museum in Fort Worth, above, and Nasher Sculpture Centre in Dallas*

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A package including one night in Grapevine, five nights in Fort Worth, and two nights in Dallas, including direct London to DFW flights starts at £1,645 pp based on two sharing. Call Bon Voyage on 023 80248 248 or visit *bon-voyage.co.uk*

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REMEDY *Hydrating mint tea*

BAG A MINT TEA TO HELP BEAT TRAVEL SICKNESS

By **AMY JONES**

Your bags are packed and you're en route to your anticipated getaway, but the excitement is overshadowed by the nuisance of feeling travel sick.

Thousands of Brits go through the ordeal, whether that's travelling by car, plane, train or boat, yet there's one cheap item a travel expert swears by.

Travel sickness, also known as motion sickness, occurs when the brain receives conflicting messages from parts of the body that sense movement.

Symptoms vary but typically include nausea, vomiting, dizziness, a headache, feeling cold and going pale or sweating.

It can be an uncomfortable feeling, particularly during a lengthy journey, with symptoms lasting up to a few hours in some cases.

If the tablets, patches, and travel bands don't work, there's a clever but simple remedy you can take before travelling, and it costs just 30p – a cup of peppermint tea.

PACK A BAG *Mint tea helps on a journey*

"People are surprised by how effective it is," travel expert Yasmin Pekel from Blue Cruise explained. "A peppermint tea bag from your local supermarket can cost 25 or 30p and it genuinely helps settle the stomach before you travel."

Due to its natural compounds, peppermint tea can help relax the stomach and relieve nausea.

"A lozenge or mint sweet can help too," says Pekel "but tea is the best option as it keeps you hydrated and the smell alone helps people feel less queasy."

The travel expert advises having a peppermint tea before your journey.

QUAINT *Village windmill*

Popular Norfolk gem is perfect for winter

LOTS TO SEA *Blakeney harbour*

QUAY *Try a guided boat tour*

CUTE *Lots of seals to see*

PRETTY *Inviting village streets*

Blakeney village attracts visitors in their droves in summer, but locals feel priced out, says MILO BOYD

In the summer, Blakeney in North Norfolk is a hive of activity. The visitors come in great numbers when the sun is shining, attracted to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its pretty stone homes, as well as hotel named the best in the country, and its large seal population.

The village also has cottages that are rented out privately for less than £500 a month. What's not to like?

But in the winter, it's a different matter. Visitor numbers plummet and many of the former fishing cottages stand empty. It's a dilemma for those who work in the area's hospitality industry, like Manor Coastal Hotel worker Tore Hill, who told me: "It is a double-edged sword for me."

It's obvious why people come. Blakeney is a lovely place. Just metres from the front of the award-winning Manor Coastal Hotel and Inn is the River Glaven, which winds its way through the National Nature Reserve. Blakeney Point is renowned for its seal colonies, too, with Beans Boats offering guided tours throughout the year.

In the 19th century, the coastal village was much closer to the sea than it is today. The estuary has silted up over the past 100 years, coinciding with the decline of the fishing industry in the area, which has prevented all but the smallest boats from reaching the quay.

What was once a fishing village is now a tourism village. In the summer, Blakeney's two pubs and three hotels are packed.

Tore added: "I love living here, but during the summer months, there's far too much traffic going through such a small place. But that does mean I'm busy with my work, which is fantastic.

"The cottages and second homes are so quiet during the winter. It's sad to know that there are so many people who'd love to live in those houses, but unfortunately, they can't live in them permanently. They're sitting there empty during the winter, and then it's so, so busy during the summer. It's a tricky one for me, as working in the tourist industry, I need it to be busy. But to see the small village that's very quaint and dainty overrun with people, yeah, it's a lot."

Tore is one of the few people born and raised in Blakeney who hasn't inherited a home but continues to live there today. She moved back to the area a decade ago after returning from Libya.

As Tore was born in the village, which only has 400 houses, she could sign up to the Blakeney Neighbourhood Housing Society. Fifty years ago, tens of millions of people across the UK were in Tore's position, with 30% of the entire population living in social housing of some kind. Now, after decades of Right to Buy and slow building rates, that figure has been slashed in half.

POPULAR *Warm welcome*

"I started working at the hotel at 14, and lived in the area my whole life. Working in a hotel and in the trade that it is all around here, the chances of buying a house would just be impossible. I was lucky enough to be signed up to the Blakeney Housing Society in 2017, and then moved in back in 2019," Tore said.

"It has changed my whole life. It means I can be around my family. A lot of my friends who were born and bred here couldn't live here due to housing problems, so they moved away to somewhere cheaper. But it is the perfect place to live. I'd never want to be anywhere else but here."

The figures underline the stark reality of the place. House prices in the Blakeney area sell for an average price of £714,000 as of November 2025, according to OnTheMarket, which is three times the national average of £273,000. And according to the Office for National Statistics, the median average salary in North Norfolk is £571 a week.

Thanks to her controlled rent, Tore pays just £478 a month for her family home.

Clearly concerned with the huge gap between average incomes and house prices, earlier this year, the district council decided to act. It imposed an additional 100% premium on top of the council tax bills of owners, leaseholders or tenants of second homes in North Norfolk, meaning they will pay double the amount for their second home.

Blakeney Parish Council chairman Rosemary Thew has admitted that the number of second and holiday homes in the area is a major issue.

"The volume of second homes is very high, around half. It's pushing prices up quite considerably. It means that, as far as locals are concerned, they can't afford to live here. You've got people [taking up dwellings] who are not key workers. A lot of them are retired people or second home owners. In winter, the streets are black because there are no lights on," she said.

And yet, for anyone wanting a peaceful break with stunning scenery, walks and wildlife – Blakeney Point's grey seal pups are born between November and January – it's the perfect place for a winter break.

> *'The volume of second homes is very high, it's pushing prices up for us quite considerably'*

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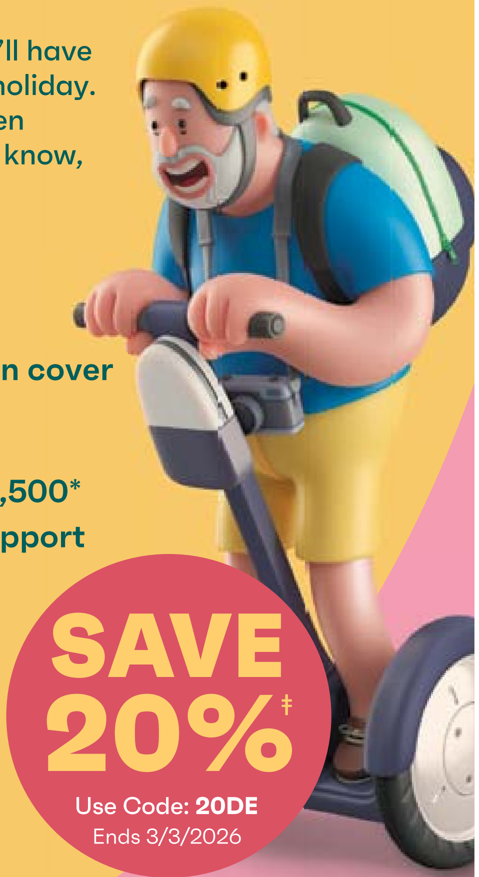

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The big day is done but the feasting continues...

Between Christmas and New Year, my favourite place is the sofa, periodically raiding the fridge. Nothing beats a Boxing Day sarnie – turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce with leftover gravy. Turkey curry is quick and perfect, or try a ham and butterbean pie – creamy and comforting. And if you've got cheese left, turn it into a leftover tart.

BEST EVER CHRISTMAS LEFTOVERS SANDWICH

PREP: 15 MINS • COOK: 10 MINS • SERVES 1 • EASY

Make the most of Christmas Day leftovers in this celebratory sandwich with pickled cabbage to cut through the richness. It's the ideal lunch for Boxing Day

- **2 cold leftover roast potatoes**
- **2tsp sunflower or olive oil**
- **50g leftover stuffing**
- **2 leftover pigs in blankets, halved lengthways, plus an extra one for the top if you like**
- **2-4 thick slices leftover roast turkey (about 100g)**
- **1tbsp wholegrain mustard**
- **2tbsp mayonnaise**
- **2 slices of bread (we used seeded)**
- **2tbsp cranberry sauce**
- **2 tbsp pickled red cabbage, or use leftover braised cabbage**
- **Handful of baby spinach or other salad leaves**
- **Hot gravy for dipping (optional)**

Feeling especially hungry? Make it a double- or triple-decker sandwich like we have in the photo, just use extra bread and fillings and pile it high. Treat yourself, it's Christmas!

1 Put the potatoes on a chopping board and gently squash them with a potato masher – try not to break them up too much, just squash them enough to flatten. Heat the oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and fry the potatoes for 5 mins on each side, or until hot and crispy. Keep warm while you reheat the stuffing, pigs in blankets and turkey in the microwave or pan.

2 Mix the mustard and mayonnaise together in a bowl, and spread over one slice of the bread (you don't need to butter it unless you are using sourdough or granary bread). Spread the cranberry sauce over the other slice. Top the mayo with the pickled red cabbage, crispy roasties, stuffing, turkey, pigs in blankets and a handful of spinach. Finally, press the cranberry-sauce-topped slice of bread on top of the sandwich. You can secure it with a skewer and top with a pig in blanket if you have another one left over. Serve with a bowl of gravy for dipping, if you like.

BRIE, APPLE & ONION TART

PREP: 20 MINS • COOK: 40 MINS • SERVES 8-12 • EASY

Apples and cheese make perfect partners in this puff pastry tart, ideal for using up the remnants of a cheeseboard or leftover cranberry sauce. Serve hot or cold for a Boxing Day buffet

- **320g pack ready-rolled all-butter puff pastry, defrosted at room temperature if frozen**
- **1tbsp olive or rapeseed oil, plus a drizzle**
- **3 large onions, halved and sliced**
- **2tbsp white wine vinegar, plus a splash**
- **1tbsp Dijon mustard**
- **Small bunch of thyme, leaves picked, plus a few sprigs to serve**
- **1 apple**
- **100g cranberry sauce (or chutney)**
- **175g brie, sliced (or other cheese)**

1 Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6 or if using an air fryer heat to 180C. Unroll the pastry sheet on to a large baking tray (leave it on the paper from the pack). If the edges are not straight or it doesn't fit in your air fryer, trim them with a sharp knife. Score a border, about 1cm in from the edge. Score a criss-cross pattern over the central piece of pastry (this will prevent it from rising too much) and around the border, if you like. Bake for 15 mins if using an oven or 10-12 mins in the air fryer.

2 Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large pan. Add the onions and cook for 10-15 mins until softened and starting to caramelise. Stir in the vinegar, bubble for 1 min more, then add the Dijon mustard and thyme, season well and set aside. Slice the apple thinly through the core so a few slices have a nice star in the middle, and remove any seeds. Toss the slices in a splash of vinegar to prevent them from browning.

3 The pastry should be puffed and starting to colour. Push down the centre, then spread

over the onions. Add blobs of cranberry sauce, then top with the apple slices and brie, overlapping them to cover the tart. Add a few more thyme sprigs, drizzle with a little oil, then put back in the oven for a further 25 mins or if using an air fryer for 10-12 mins until the cheese is bubbling and the apple slices are soft. Serve warm or cold.

LEFTOVER TURKEY CURRY

PREP: 20 MINS • COOK: 30 MINS • SERVES 4 • EASY

Crave spice after the traditional Christmas lunch? Want to turn your leftover turkey into a whole new dish? This tasty turkey tikka masala is for you

- **Sunflower oil**
- **Onion, finely chopped**
- **3 garlic cloves, crushed or finely grated**
- **Thumb-sized piece of ginger, peeled and finely grated**
- **1 red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped**
- **1tsp cumin seeds**
- **1tsp ground coriander**
- **½ tsp paprika**
- **½ tsp ground turmeric**
- **½ tsp garam masala**
- **1tbsp tomato puree**
- **400g can passata or chopped tomatoes**
- **1tbsp mango chutney**
- **100ml double cream**
- **2tbsp natural yogurt (optional)**
- **About 600g leftover roast turkey, in chunks**
- **Chopped coriander, toasted flaked almonds, steamed rice and garlic naan breads, to serve**

1 Heat the oil in a casserole dish or shallow pan over a medium heat, and fry the onions for 10-12 mins until golden. Stir in garlic, ginger, chilli and all the spices, and cook for 2 mins more until the mixture resembles a paste. Stir in the tomato puree, passata or chopped tomatoes and mango chutney, and simmer. Cook for a further 10 mins.

2 Stir in most of the cream and the yogurt, if using, and return the mixture to a simmer. Add the turkey and continue to simmer until the turkey is piping hot. Remove from the heat, drizzle over the remaining cream and stir through briefly. Scatter over some coriander and flaked almonds, and serve with the rice and naan breads on the side.

CREAMY BUTTER BEAN, HAM & LEEK PIE

PREP: 30 MINS • COOK: 1 HR • SERVES 4-6 • EASY

This creamy pie is perfect for cold winter days – the butter beans melt into the filling and pair wonderfully with the ham and sweet leeks

- **2tbsp olive oil**
- **25g butter**
- **1 onion, halved and chopped**
- **2 leeks, halved lengthways and sliced**
- **3 garlic cloves, crushed**
- **5 sage leaves, finely chopped**
- **6 thyme sprigs, leaves picked**
- **1tbsp plain flour**
- **1 chicken stock cube**
- **400g cooked gammon or thick-sliced ham, cut into small chunks**
- **570g jar butter beans**
- **150g mascarpone**
- **1tbsp Dijon mustard**
- **320g sheet all-butter puff pastry**
- **1 egg, beaten**
- **Mash and seasonal veg to serve**

1 Heat the oil and butter in a flameproof casserole dish over a low-medium heat and cook the onion and leeks for 10-15 mins, stirring often until soft and beginning to caramelise.

2 Turn up the heat slightly and stir in the garlic, sage leaves and most of the thyme. Season with black pepper. After a couple of minutes, stir in the flour and cook for 2 mins more.

3 Crumble the stock cube into a jug and top up with 250ml water. Stir the stock into the pan, adding it slowly and mixing to prevent lumps forming. Bring to a gentle simmer.

4 Stir in the gammon and butter beans, along with the liquid from the jar, plus the mascarpone and mustard. Simmer for 5 mins to reduce the sauce slightly. Season to taste – go easy on the salt as the ham and stock are already salty. Cool and chill the filling until you're ready to serve, or transfer to a 24cm pie dish.

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5 Heat the oven to 190C/170C fan/gas 5. Unroll the pastry on a work surface and brush all over with the egg. Cut the pastry into roughly 4cm squares using a pizza cutter. Lay the pastry squares over the pie filling, starting at the edge of the pie dish and working your way towards the centre. If you have any squares leftover, cook them alongside the pie to serve on the side. Sprinkle over the rest of the thyme leaves, then bake for 40 mins (or 45 mins from chilled) until the pastry is deep golden brown and the filling is bubbling. Serve with mash and seasonal veg, if you like.

GROW THE PLOT THICKENS

With **DAVID DOMONEY** *daviddomoney.com*
YouTube.com/DavidDomoney

SKETCH IT OUT
Plot out your patch

Plan your new garden for 2026

Whether it's a new border, fruit and veg, or some naturalistic planting, it's time to get to work

As the Christmas rush slows and the last leftovers are eaten, your garden can bring a fresh burst of optimism. Now is the perfect moment to look back at the year just gone and shape your plans for 2026.

PAUSE AND LOOK BACK:

The quiet days between Christmas and New Year are perfect for a gentle wander round the garden. Wrap up warm with a hot drink, look, and reflect.

Ask yourself two simple questions. What did you love about your garden this year?

WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

Consider moments that made you smile. Perhaps it was a brilliant container display of spring bulbs, tomatoes that kept coming, or a border buzzing with bees in summer. Then, notice the areas you would like to improve – bare corners in winter, containers you struggled to maintain, or lawns which need some love. These will give you some great starting points for next year.

TRENDS FOR 2026:

Garden trends for next year will continue to focus on spaces working hard for people and wildlife. Many designers talk about naturalistic planting, climate resilience, and gardens which feel like relaxed outdoor rooms.You're likely to see an increase in wildlife-friendly flowers, drought-tolerant plants, rainwater harvesting, and homegrown produce. These ideas suit every size of plot, from balconies to back gardens.

SET SIMPLE GROWING GOALS:

Now, you can turn reflection into action. Choose a couple of clear, achievable goals to start with. You might decide to grow more fruit and vegetables you eat weekly, add late-flowering plants for autumn colour, or soften a front garden with planting.

Sketch a plan of your space, marking where the sun falls. Think about how you live too. Where do you like to sit in the garden? What floral fragrances might you want nearby? Finally, for food crops, use winter evenings to plan bed layouts, crop rotation, and companion planting.

PREPARATION YOU CAN DO NOW:

Even in late December, there is useful work to do. On mild days, clear away old annuals, remove weeds, and spread compost or well-rotted manure on empty beds so the soil is enriched for spring. Check tree stakes and ties after winter winds, and tidy paths so they are safe in icy conditions.

Clean tools, pots and seed trays, and sort seed packets so you know what you already have. If you can, fit a water butt or direct a downpipe into a barrel to capture rain for next summer.

A little thoughtful planning now will help your 2026 garden be more beautiful, more resilient and a real joy to spend time in.

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Marilyn's Story

TIDY UP
Clear out old annuals

TIDY
Dispose of leaves

IDEAS
Maybe add a water butt

RECYCLE
Create a compost heap

TOP 5 GARDENING JOBS

TOP TIP
Ames loppers

1 On a quiet afternoon, sort through your seed packets for next year. Check the "sow by" dates and group them into early, mid- and late-season piles. Out-of-date seeds may still germinate but highlight any favourites you want to replace when new ranges arrive.

2 Late December is a good time to prune established apple trees while they are dormant, if the weather is dry and frost-free. Use tools like sharp Ames long-reach loppers for higher growth and a pruning saw for thicker branches. Remove crossing, damaged or congested wood to open the centre and shorten overly vigorous shoots. Aim for an airy, goblet-shaped framework so sunlight can reach ripening fruit next year.

See these loppers in action on my YouTube channel, @daviddomoney.

3 Use mild spells to plant bare-root roses. Soak the roots in a bucket of water for half an hour before planting, then set them into well-prepared soil enriched with garden compost. Spread the roots out, keep the graft union just above soil level, firm gently and water well. This gives bushes a head start so they can root in before spring growth.

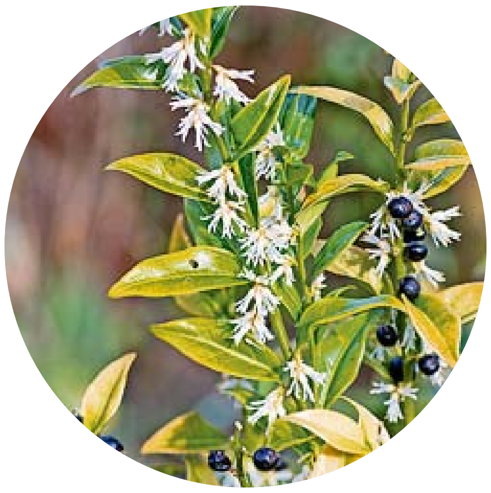
4 Indoors, keep kalanchoe looking neat by trimming away spent flower stems. Use clean scissors to snip them off close to the foliage, then give the plant a bright windowsill and a light watering when the compost dries.

With a short rest and good light, many kalanchoes will send up another flush of colourful blooms.

5 If you grow figs, remove any larger unripe fruits lingering lower down the stems. These chunky figs will not ripen now and simply drain the plant's energy. Leave the tiny pea-sized fruits near the shoot tips, as these are the ones most likely to develop into next year's delicious harvest.

FOCUS ON

SWEET BOX



Few plants cheer up a chilly garden like sweet box, Sarcococca confusa with its glossy, dark green leaves and tidy shape. From December, it produces white flowers tucked along the stems. They may look modest, but they emit a rich, sweet scent, and later the flowers are followed by shiny black berries.

December is a good time to plant a sweet box if the soil is not frozen or waterlogged. Choose a spot in partial or full shade with moist but well-drained soil. Work plenty of compost in to improve the structure, then plant at the same depth as it was in the pot, firm gently and water well. In containers, use a loam-based, peat-free compost and make sure drainage holes are clear.

For smaller gardens, look out for compact relations such as Sarcococca hookeriana 'Winter Gem' or 'Fragrant Valley', which pack the same scent into tighter plants ideal for pots and low hedges. Light trimming, if needed, is best done after flowering.

Fun fact: Sweet box sits in the box family, which is why it has foliage paired with such a wonderfully sweet winter fragrance.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the wild, poinsettias are tall shrubs or small trees in Mexico, often topping three metres. They naturally colour up around winter which is why they are perfect for Christmas. Find out more at my YouTube channel @daviddomoney.

As an evergreen symbol of protection and merrymaking, ivy featured in midwinter celebrations, and then its meanings were folded into Christian festive decorations and carols.

Sweet chestnut's story in Britain is a bit tangled. Many believe the Romans brought it, while newer archaeological evidence questions that. Whatever its origin, it has long been prized for sturdy timber, roasted winter nuts and kernels that can be dried and ground into flour.

Camellia varieties such as "Yuletide" can bloom from autumn, producing rose-like red flowers just as many other plants shut down, so they are perfect for bringing some festive colour into your home.

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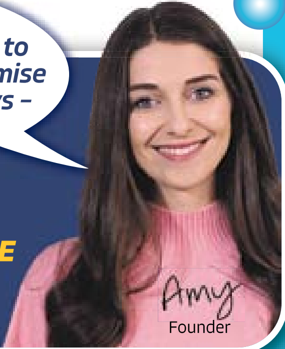
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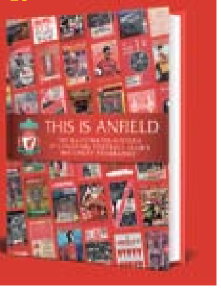
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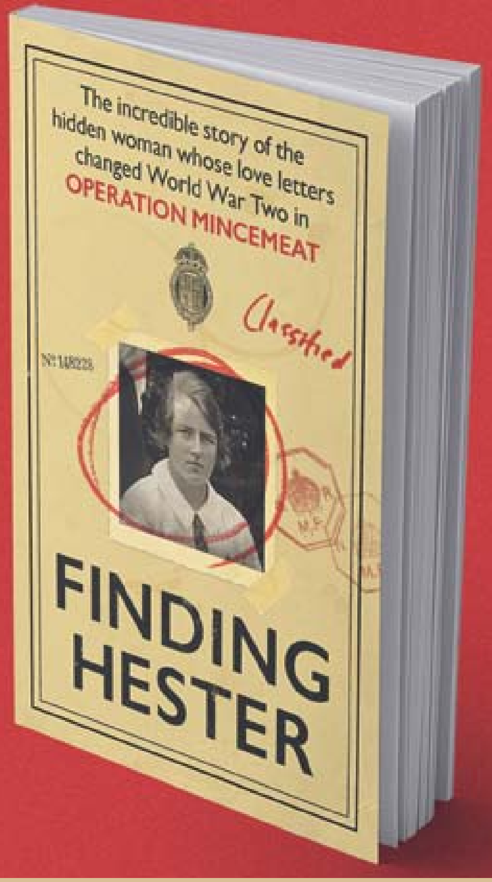
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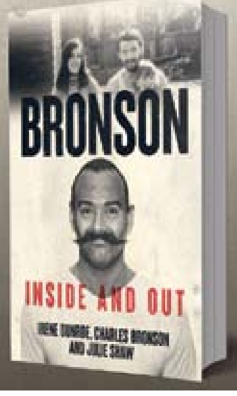
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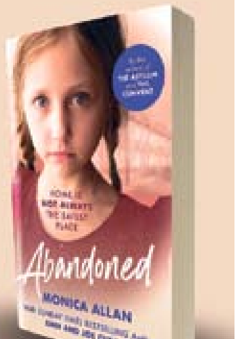
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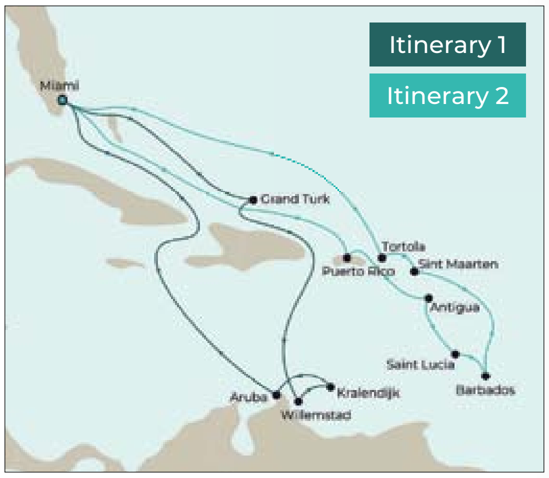

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At the core of the mattress, 2000 individually pocketed springs move independently to respond to your shape and reduce motion transfer. This means less disturbance from a restless partner and more consistent support, whether you sleep on your back, side, or stomach. Surrounding the springs is a trio of foam layers designed to ease pressure points and gently cushion your body, helping you relax into a naturally comfortable position.

Above the foam sits a soft quilted top that adds an extra layer of comfort the moment you lie down. The mattress is finished in a breathable knit fabric that encourages airflow, helping regulate temperature so the surface stays comfortable throughout the night. This makes the Sleeply Hybrid a practical option for those who tend to overheat or prefer a mattress that stays consistently fresh.

Durability is also built into the design. Reinforced edges and precision-stitched black piping help the mattress maintain its shape, providing edge-to-edge support and stability. This reduces sagging over time and ensures you can use the full sleep surface with confidence. The construction is designed to hold up to regular use while keeping its supportive feel night after night.

With its thoughtful combination of support, comfort, and long-lasting build quality, the Sleeply Hybrid Mattress 2000 offers a reliable, well-balanced sleep experience. It's a practical choice for anyone who wants a mattress that works with their body, provides consistent pressure relief, and remains breathable and supportive over time.

PRODUCT DETAILS

- Mattress type: 2000 Pocket springs, quilted top with three foam layers and soft fibres
- Breathable fabric helps regulate temperature
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Comfort, style, and practicality come together in the Almeira 2 Seat Recliner Sofa. Designed for two, this sofa combines soft, supportive seating with durable bonded leather upholstery and classic styling, making it a versatile addition to any living space.

INDEPENDENT RECLINE FOR TAILORED RELAXATION

Each seat reclines independently using a simple manual handle, allowing both users to find the perfect position for reading, watching TV, or simply unwinding after a long day. The smooth operation ensures you can adjust your position without strain, giving you control over comfort whenever you need it.

SUPPORTIVE, PLUSH SEATING

The Almeira sofa features pocket-sprung and foam-filled interiors, providing lasting support while remaining soft and inviting. A high, cushioned backrest and padded armrests offer additional comfort, ensuring your posture is supported during extended periods of sitting. The combination of resilient materials and thoughtful design makes this sofa a reliable place to relax day after day.

DURABLE MATERIALS, DESIGNED TO LAST

Upholstered in high-quality bonded leather, with faux leather accents in low-stress areas, the Almeira sofa is both stylish and resilient. Its sturdy construction and robust frame provide long-term durability, ensuring the sofa maintains its shape and comfort over time.

CONVENIENT DELIVERY AND CARE

Delivered and carefully assembled in your room of choice by a dedicated two-person team, the Almeira sofa arrives ready to enjoy. Cleaning is simple - just wipe with a damp or dry cloth, avoiding abrasive cleaners. This sofa offers a combination of style, comfort, and durability that's easy to maintain, making it a practical and welcoming addition to your home.

Available in 3 colours:

● Black ● Brown ● Grey

- ✓ Manually operated recliner
- ✓ Covered in a durable bonded leather
- ✓ Left and right seats recline independently
- ✓ Dimensions: H92 x W142 x D85 cm

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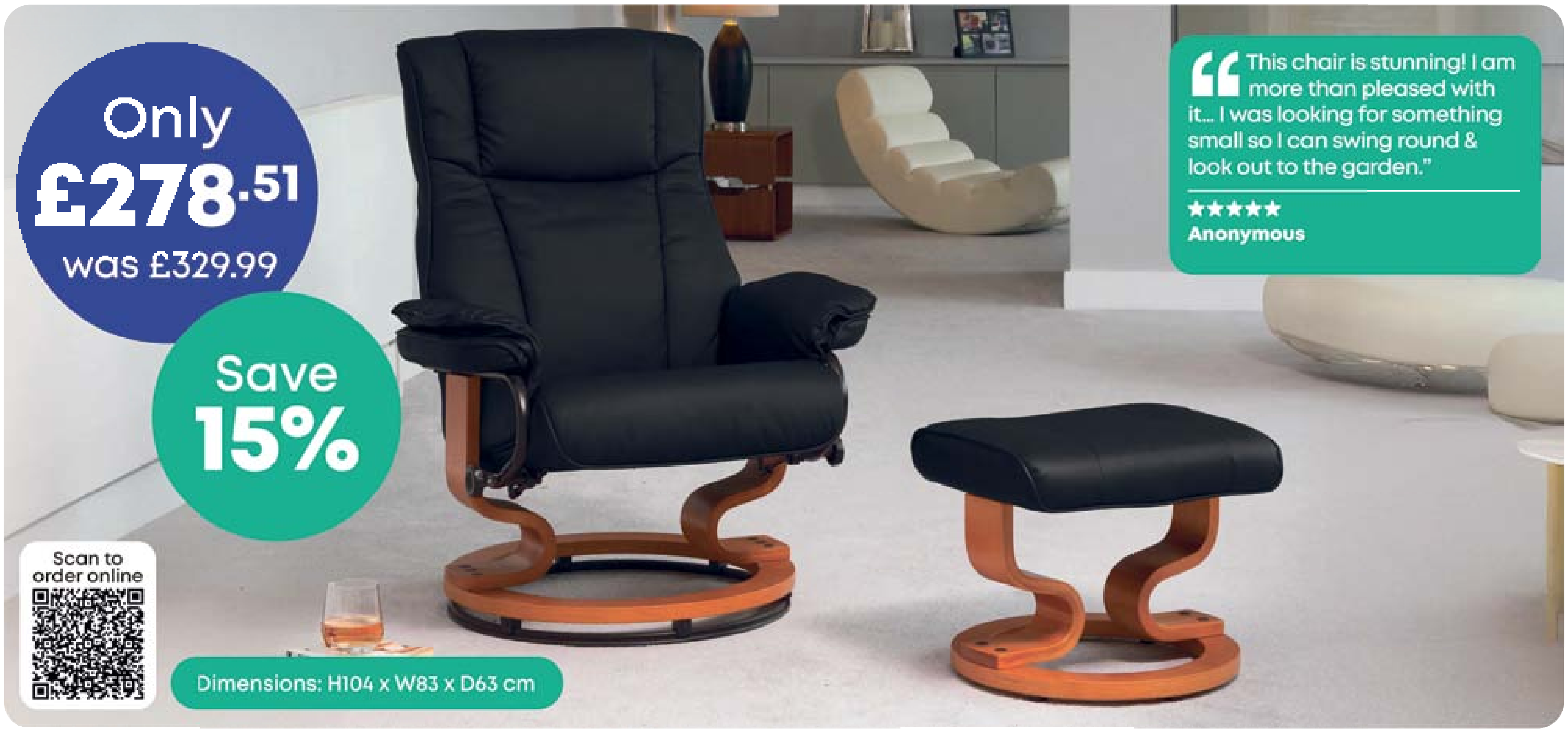

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Dimensions: H104 x W83 x D63 cm

Whether you’re settling in for an evening of television or giving your back a well-earned rest, having a supportive chair makes all the difference. The Calhoun Swivel Recliner combines spacious, cushioned seating with massage points across the seat, upper back, and lower back, while a gentle lumbar heat function delivers targeted comfort exactly where it’s needed. Together, these features create a seating experience that feels both soothing and genuinely restorative.

ADAPTIVE POSITIONING FOR EVERYDAY USE

Complete with a matching footstool, the chair sits on a stable wooden base and is upholstered in soft, durable bonded leather. Its swivel mechanism, operated via a discreet ring beneath the base, allows effortless movement when adjusting your position or reaching for nearby items. The body-responsive recline lets you ease back smoothly and settle into a comfortable angle, and once you’ve found the position that feels right, the under-chair handle locks it securely in place, ensuring consistent support.

TARGETED COMFORT WHERE YOU NEED IT

The integrated massage points and lumbar heat function provide gentle, focused relief for the back, helping ease tension after long periods of standing, working, or sitting at a desk. These features make the chair ideal for reading, watching television, or enjoying quiet breaks throughout the day when you need a moment to take the pressure off.

COMFORT THAT FITS A VARIETY OF SPACES

With a versatile and inviting design, the Calhoun fits comfortably into living rooms, bedrooms, home offices, or a quiet corner you’d like to turn into a personal retreat. The footstool allows you to elevate your legs and stretch out fully, enhancing comfort, supporting posture, and creating a welcoming place to unwind whenever you need it.

A practical, well-crafted companion for everyday life, the Calhoun provides a refined seating experience where comfort and relief come effortlessly.

Available in 5 colours:

● Cream ● Brown ● Burgundy ● Grey ● Black

- ✓ Covered in soft, durable bonded leather
- ✓ Warming heat function
- ✓ Massage points in seat, lower and upper back
- ✓ Supplied with matching footstool

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WEIGHT FOR IT

Raffles holds ticket if he can shoulder big burden

IT'S GOING TO BE TENSE Intense Raffles is taken to pull off a shock in the Welsh Grand National

By **The Scout** (Melissa Jones)

INTENSE RAFFLES (2.50) is fancied to pull off a record weight-carrying performance in the £170,000 Coral Welsh Grand National.

Limonali (1961), Carvill's Hill (1991) and Native River (2016) all raced to first place in Chepstow's marathon event saddled with 11st 12lb.

But the Thomas Gibney-trained staying chaser can edge their achievements with an extra 2lb and Bryony Frost travelling over from France for the ride.

Intense Raffles landed the Irish version of this at Fairyhouse in 2024, which led to last year's campaign being centred around the English National.

Having tried to concede 3lb to Nick Rockett – the big-race hero at Aintree – in the Grade Two Bobbyjo Chase, my selection was a leading ante-post pick for many.

However, he did not take to the jumping test and this is his first crack at an extended distance since, after shaping as though he needed the outing in the Coral Gold Cup at Newbury.

Intense Raffles was still in contention rounding the home turn and weight might not be such a big factor as it usually is as conditions are traditionally more testing in Wales.

Fellow grey **MACKTOAD** (1.40, nb) is going places fast and is tipped to follow-up an eyecatching debut for the Moore family in the Grade Two Coral Finale Juvenile Hurdle.

BEN SOLO (3.25) was reeled in by an improving horse over course and distance 21 days ago and can make amends under 5lb claimer Jamie Brace.

If ready to go after a 302-day break, **RAMO** (2.10) is nicely weighted on his form over flights with the likes of 134-rated Nurse Susan and Transmission, who has a chase mark of 129.

At Kempton, it is hoped **GABRIEL'S GETAWAY** (2.30) will finish strongly to scoop the Grade Two Ladbrokes Desert Orchid Handicap Chase, where the reassessed Thistle Ask and Sans Bruit should set a good pace.

Representing the successful King George VI Chase combination Ben Pauling and Ben Jones, the smooth-jumping **MAMBONUMBERFIVE** (1.55, trb) is backed to take the same-level Ladbrokes Wayward Lad Novices' Chase.

Lightly raced **BECTIVE ABBEY** (3.07) still has more to offer in the Ladbrokes 'Big Football Bet Builder Boosts' Handicap Chase, while **WILLIETHEBUILDER** (3.37) is finding his form after joining the Christian Williams stable in October.

And the 2023 'Join Ladbrokes Bet 5 Get 30' Mares' Handicap Hurdle runner-up **GAYE LEGACY** (1.20) has a good each-way chance once more.

KEMPTON RACINGTV

Premier Raceday

12.45 JUVENILE HURDLE (GBB RACE) 3YO
£15,609 (Class 2) 2m (9 declared)

1 1 ● **MAESTRO CONTI (101)** D Skelton 11-5 .... **H Skelton** –
2 2 **BRAVE GUEST (19)** Miss S West 11-0 .... **M Goldstein** 106
3 **CHARTWELL JOCK (F38)** Seamus Mullins 11-0 .... **D Sansom** –
4 **PROVISION (F74)** F Brennan 11-0 .... **Isabelle Ryder** –
5 L **TENADAAY (19)** F O'Brien 11-0 .... **J J Burke** 101
6 **TETSWORTH (F84)** G & J Moore 11-0 .... **F Mitchell** –
7 **WHATSGOINGONMARVIN (F68) (T)** M Bowen 11-0 **J Bowen** –
8 2 **ZARAKERJACK (33)** G & J Moore 11-0 .... **T P Queally** ★113
9 **MISS RAFFLES (F105)** C Poulton 10-7 .... **J Best** –

SP FORECAST: Evens Maestro Conti, 3 Zarakerjack, 11-2 Whatsgoingonmarvin, 7 Tetsworth, 16 Chartwell Jock, 25 Brave Guest, 33 Tenadaay, 50 Provision, 100 Miss Raffles.
2024: Knight Templar 11-0, Ben Jones 15-2 (R Stephens), 7 ran.

1.20 MARES' HANDICAP HURDLE
£15,609 (2) 3m 121yds (10) ITV1

1 215L-L3 **DELLA CASA LUNGA (33) (C&D)** 7 12 0 .... **R Patrick** 124
Runs: 23 Wins: 4(S,GS) Places: 6 £71,836
Trainer: C Boultbee-Brooks Owner: C & C Boultbee Brooks

2 511-520 **GREYVAL (14)** 6 11 3 .... **J J Burke** 134
Runs: 18 Wins: 4(S,G) Places: 3 £82,144
Trainer: F O'Brien Owner: The Oakley Partnership

3 2-131LP **MUSIQUE DE FEE (7) (D)** 6 11 2 .... **J Bryan** 132
Runs: 20 Wins: 5(GS,G) Places: 3 £42,819
Trainer: G Nicholls Owner: The Happy Amigos

4 097333 **PORTER IN THE PARK (35)** 8 10 13 .... **C Johnstone-Baker(10)** 134
Runs: 28 Wins: 5(G) Places: 8 £58,751
Trainer: E Lavelle Owner: Andrew Gemmell & Richard Lavelle

5 55132-2 **HOLLY HARTINGO (33)** 9 10 12 .... **C Gethings** 132
Runs: 18 Wins: 3(S,GS) Places: 5 £31,527
Trainer: A Ralph Owner: The Hhh Partnership

6 2184L-2 **STAR WALKING (35)** 6 10 10 .... **H Cobden** 135
Runs: 8 Wins: 3(S,G) Places: 2 £15,010
Trainer: H Fry Owner: Noel Fehily Racing Syndicate - Star

7 2212P- **MISS CYNTHIA (254)** 5 10 9 .... **H Skelton** 133
Runs: 5 Wins: 1(GS) Places: 3 £17,995
Trainer: D Skelton Owner: Mrs Lindy Ohare

8 52/41P-8 ● **GAYE LEGACY (35)** 7 10 8 .... **B Poste** ★136
Runs: 16 Wins: 3(S,GS) Places: 7 £42,042
Trainer: T SymondsOwner: Chase The Dream And Mrs R F Knipe

9 311-662 **AUDACIOUS ANNIE (37) (F)** 6 10 7 .... **Isabelle Ryder(7)** 133
Runs: 10 Wins: 3(S,G) Places: 3 £16,942
Trainer: J Snowden Owner: Mr Semore Kurdi

10 33412-F **I'VE MADEUPMYMIND (33) 5 10 2**.**B R Jones** 133
Runs: 9 Wins: 1(S) Places: 4 £10,651
Trainer: B Pauling Owner: Mrs C A Waters

VISOR: No. 3 TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 1, 6, 7 CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 1, 5, 8, 9.
SP FORECAST: 11-4 Miss Cynthia, 5 Star Walking, 11-2 Della Casa Lunga, 7 Audacious Annie, 8 I've Madeupmymind, Holly Hartingo, 12 Greyval, 14 Porter In The Park, Gaye Legacy, 16 Musique De Fee.
2024: Della Casa Lunga 6-11-7, Richard Patrick 7-2 (C Boultbee-Brooks), 8 ran.
GUIDE: Smart Flat performer **MISS CYNTHIA** makes her debut for the Dan Skelton yard and, following a wind operation and with the addition of a tongue-tie, it would be no surprise to see her go very well off this mark. **Della Casa Lunga** was third in a Listed event at this venue (2m5f, gd) in November and she must not be discounted, while the return to hurdling should help **Greyval**. Others to note are **Star Walking**, **Audacious Annie** and **Holly Hartingo**.

GOSSIP FROM THE GALLOPS

North: O'CONNELL (2.50 Chepstow)	**Newmarket: TEWKESBURY** (6.00 Wolverhampton)
Midlands: THISTLE ASK (2.30 Kempton)	**Lambourn: GALASHIELS** (12.00 Chepstow)

THE SCOUT

12.45	Maestro Conti	2.30	Gabriel's Getaway
1.20	Gaye Legacy	3.07	Bective Abbey
1.55	MAMBONUMBERFIVE (nb)	3.37	Williethebuilder

1.55 LADBROKES NOVICES' CHASE (G 2)
£42,712 (1) 2m (5) ITV1

1 125-11P **ALNILAM (21) (D)** 6 11 7 .... **J Bowen** 154
Runs: 13 Wins: 5(S,GS,G) Places: 3 £118,294
Trainer: O Murphy Owner: Mrs A Williams And Mr A Badri

2 3097-L1 **HANSARD (14) (D)** 7 11 4 .... **H Cobden** 132
Runs: 19 Wins: 5(S,GS,G) £87,935
Trainer: G & J Moore Owner: Noel Fehily Racing Syndicates Hansard

3 2L20-1L **LUMP SUM (21) (D)** 7 11 4 .... **D Johnston**★163
Runs: 14 Wins: 6(S,GS) Places: 4 £170,762
Trainer: S Thomas Owner: Walters Plant Hire Ltd

4 1310-81 **MIRABAD (22)** 6 11 4 .... **H Skelton** 151
Runs: 10 Wins: 4(GS,G) Places: 3 £36,493
Trainer: D Skelton Owner: The Forefold Racing Partnership

5 2P17-11 ● **MAMBONUMBERFIVE (29) (D)** 4 10 12 .... **B R Jones** 142
Runs: 8 Wins: 3(GS) Places: 2 £91,232
Trainer: B Pauling Owner: Mal Bloodstock Ltd

TONGUE STRAP: No. 4 HOOD: Nos. 1, 4.
SP FORECAST: 11-8 Lump Sum, 7-2 Mambonumberfive, 4 Mirabad, 5 Alnilam, 10 Hansard.
2024: Sir Gino 4-10-12, Nico De Boinville 8-13 Fav (N Henderson), 4 ran.
GUIDE: LUMP SUM followed his promising chasing debut success at Uttoxeter (2m, gd-sft) with another fine effort at Sandown. Third to Arkle favourite Lulamba in the Grade 1 Henry VIII (1m7f, gd-sft) on that occasion, Sam Thomas appears to have found his charge an easier opportunity. **Alnilam** was pulled up behind the selection after a bad mistake at Sandown. He won nicely at Cheltenham (2m, gd-sft) prior to that, though, and can feature with a clear round. The four-year-old **Mambonumberfive** enters calculations in receipt of weight, having completed a double over fences with last month's success at Newbury (2m, gd-sft).

2.30 HANDICAP CHASE (GRADE 2)
£56,950 (1) 2m (7) ITV1

1 331-121 **SAINT SEGAL (20) (D)** 7 11 12 .... **C Gethings** 159
Runs: 27 Wins: 8(S,F,GS,G)Places: 8 £232,158
Trainer: Mrs J Williams Owner: Culverhill Racing Club V

2 4/2FL-PL **BOOTHILL (21) (C&D)** 10 11 6 .... **B Carver** 134
Runs: 25 Wins: 7(S,GS,G) Places: 5 £333,402
Trainer: H Fry Owner: Brian & Sandy Lambert

3 1/21-111 **THISTLE ASK (50) (D)** 8 11 3 .... **H Skelton** 161
Runs: 13 Wins: 5(GS,G) Places: 3 £116,428
Trainer: D Skelton Owner: Mr T C McKeever

4 L11-665 **SANS BRUIT (14) (D)** 7 10 10 .... **H Cobden**★162
Runs: 33 Wins: 8(S,GS,G) Places: 5 £443,112
Trainer: P Nicholls Owner: Mr Andy Peake

5 4126U-1 **RYAN'S ROCKET (28) (D)** 7 10 6 .... **J J Burke** 159
Runs: 12 Wins: 5(S,GS,G) Places: 1 £50,589
Trainer: F O'BrienOwner: Noel Fehily Racing Syndicate - Ryan's

6 1/5-P224 ● **GABRIEL'S GETAWAY (35) (D) 8 10 6** .... **R Dingle** 156
Runs: 17 Wins: 4(G) Places: 2 £84,328
Trainer: A Honeyball Owner: Buckingham, Chapman, Kingston &Langfor

7 9/2L33-F **CALGARY TIGER (41) (D) 10 10 6** .... **J Best** –
Runs: 20 Wins: 2(GS,G) Places: 2 £24,891
Trainer: W De Best-Turner Owner: Mr W de Best-Turner

TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 HOOD: No. 3.
SP FORECAST: 7-4 Thistle Ask, 3 Ryan's Rocket, 4 Saint Segal, 6 Gabriel's Getaway, 8 Sans Bruit, 12 Boothill, 200 Calgary Tiger.
2024: Soul Icon 7-10-6, Harry Cobden 16-1 (Kieran Burke), 7 ran.
GUIDE: Thistle Ask hasn't looked back since joining the Dan Skelton team and he must enter calculations in his bid to complete a five-timer. However, he is another 14lb higher following his triumph over subsequent Kelso (2m1f, sft) winner **Saint Segal** in the Haldon Gold Cup at Exeter (2m1f, gd) and that could prove his downfall. Preference is for **RYAN'S ROCKET,** who produced a career-best performance when making a winning reappearance at Newbury (2m, gd-sft) and he may prove to be slightly better treated off 6lb higher. **Gabriel's Getaway** is also forecast to feature.

3.07 LADBROKES HANDICAP CHASE
£26,015 (3) 3m (7) ITV1

1 121-222 **VIROFLAY (33) (C)** 8 12 1 .... **Miss Olive Nicholls(5)** ★140
Runs: 17 Wins: 8(S,G) Places: 5 £25,271
Trainer: P Nicholls Owner: Mr Paul Nicholls & Mr John Bolton

2 2P1L-3P **BEACHCOMBER (56) (C&D)** 7 11 13 .. **J J Burke** 139
Runs: 17 Wins: 4(GS,G) Places: 3 £63,202
Trainer: J & A O'Neill Owner: Mrs E J Wills

3 36-7271 **KAP VERT (16)** 5 11 6 .... **Sean Houlihan** 137
Runs: 11 Wins: 2(S,G) Places: 4 £15,268
Trainer: P Hobbs & J White Owner: If The Kap Fits

4 P/167P-6 **WISEGUY (28) (D)** 9 11 4 .... **J Bowen** 138
Runs: 15 Wins: 4(GS) Places: 2 £50,516
Trainer: N Henderson Owner: The Wise Guys & Girls

5 13PP-11 **MONTREGARD (36) (D)** 6 11 1 .... **S Sheppard** 137
Runs: 12 Wins: 5(S,G) Places: 2 £36,309
Trainer: T Lacey Owner: Mr John P McManus

6 P41623 **PRINCE ZALTAR (14)** 8 10 13 .... **H Skelton** 138
Runs: 34 Wins: 5(GS,G) Places: 10 £76,297
Trainer: D Skelton Owner: The Blind Squirrels

7 1/P1-262 ● **BECTIVE ABBEY (21) (F)** 7 10 12 **R T Dunne** 137
Runs: 8 Wins: 3(S,G) Places: 1 £17,168
Trainer: N Henderson Owner: Mr Mark Blandford

BLINKERS: No. 2 VISOR: No. 5 CHEEK PIECES: No. 6.
SP FORECAST: 7-2 Kap Vert, 4 Viroflay, Montregard, Prince Zaltar, 6 Bective Abbey, 8 Beachcomber, 14 Wiseguy.
2024: Beachcomber 6-11-6, Richie McLernon 10-1 (J & A O'Neill), 11 ran.
GUIDE: KAP VERT took to fences like a natural when winning at Taunton (2m7f, gd) by over seven lengths after racing prominently. Although this is a bigger ask off 8lb higher, he had plenty in hand and can only learn from the experience. **Montregard** is looking for a hat-trick after wins at Worcester (2m7f, gd) and Ascot (3m, gd), but an added 6lb seems harsh and may mean he has to settle for a place. **Viroflay**, second here (3m, gd) last month, deserves to get his head back in front under Olive Nicholls, but may need to come down a pound or two before that happens.

3.37 HANDICAP HURDLE
£11,618 (3) 2m (7) ITV1

1 1L0-1L7 **WASHINGTON (14) (D)** 9 11 9 .... **M Fox(7)** 136
Runs: 21 Wins: 7(S,GS,G) Places: 3 £118,635
Trainer: Harry Derham Owner: Syders & Burkes

2 L18-11P **NARDARAN (40) (D)** 4 11 6 .... **H Cobden** 135
Runs: 7 Wins: 3(F,GS) £26,990
Trainer: P Nicholls Owner: Martin Broughton & Friends 2

3 342116 **DE TEMPS EN TEMPS (42) (D)** 6 11 4 .... **F Keighley(7)** 133
Runs: 10 Wins: 3(GS,G) Places: 4 £28,545
Trainer: M Keighley Owner: The Snapper Partnership

4 251-111 **TRUSTINTIMES (36) (D)** 4 11 3 .... **B Carver** 134
Runs: 6 Wins: 4(G) Places: 1 £28,061
Trainer: H Fry Owner: The Time On Our Hands Boys' Syndicate

5 31-1123 **INDEMNITY (28) (D,F)** 5 11 2 .... **B R Jones** 139
Runs: 7 Wins: 3(G) Places: 2 £36,851
Trainer: E Lavelle Owner: Andrew Gemmell & Richard Lavelle

6 321-614 **WANDERING EGO (33) (D)** 5 11 2 .... **J Bowen** 134
Runs: 7 Wins: 2(GS,G) Places: 1 £11,622
Trainer: O Murphy Owner: Mrs Diana L Whateley

7 48-LL32 ● **WILLIETHEBUILDER (14) (D)** 6 11 2 .... **T McCain-Mitchell(5)** ★140
Runs: 18 Wins: 2(GS,G) Places: 5 £42,265
Trainer: Christian Williams Owner: Mrs Susan Carsberg

TONGUE STRAP: No. 2 CHEEK PIECES: No. 2.
SP FORECAST: 7-4 Indemnity, 3 Wandering Ego, 4 Trustintimes, 7 Williethebuilder, 12 De Temps En Temps, 14 Washington, 16 Nardaran.
2024: Ooh Betty 6-11-2, Ben Jones 7-1 (Ben Clarke), 8 ran.
GUIDE: The improving **Indemnity** has gone from strength to strength since his return in October and even a repeat of his third at Newbury (2m, sft) will see him bang there. **Wandering Ego** is one to keep an eye on as an opening mark of 124 might prove to be lenient, but the vote goes to **TRUSTINTIMES.** Harry Fry's charge made a mockery of his price of 20/1 when making a successful handicap debut at Ascot (2m, gd) last month and, despite having a 6lb higher mark to contend with, he could be up to the task.

TRACK FACTS: GOING: Good. Right Handed. **TOP TRACK JOCKEY (2020-25):** Harry Cobden 17% Strike rate. **TOP TRACK TRAINER (2020-25):** N Henderson 23% Strike rate. **FIRST TIME:** 1.20 Musique De Fee (visor), Miss Cynthia (tongue strap, wind surgery), Gaye Legacy (cheek pieces). **BEATEN FAVOURITES:** 3.07 Prince Zaltar(hcp ch). 3.37 Wandering Ego. **LONGEST TRAVELLER: Whatsgoingonmarvin** (12.45) 230 miles. **STABLE SWITCH:** 12.45 **Maestro Conti** from N George & A Zetterholm in France to D Skelton, **Provision** from P Midgley to F Brennan, **Tetsworth** from J Camacho to G & J Moore, **Whatsgoingonmarvin** from Sir M Prescott to M Bowen. 1.20 **Miss Cynthia** from L Wadham to D Skelton.

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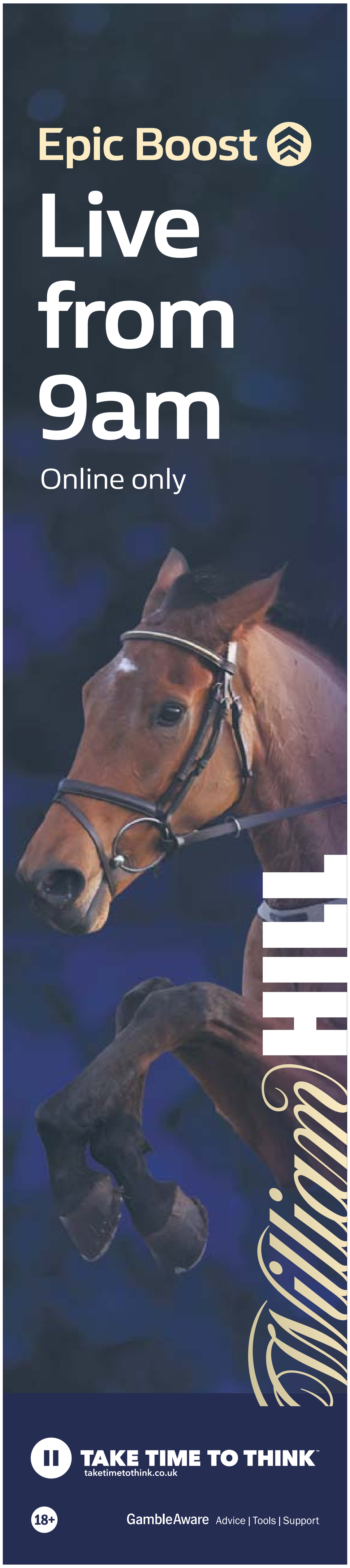

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KING HARRY

By **David Yates**

HARRY REDKNAPP toasted success in the Champions League as The Jukebox Man carried his colours to victory in a drama-laden King George VI Chase.

With Kempton Park's future in the balance, the great race was in need of a classic –and it got one.

Four of the eight runners were covered by a single hoofbeat on landing at the last of the 18 fences, 150 yards from the finish of the three-mile test.

Defending champion Banbridge headed The Jukebox Man at the final obstacle but the 7-1 chance and jockey Ben Jones struck back to land a three-way photo by a nose, with 9-4 favourite Gaelic Warrior the same distance away in third. In the tightest finish of the King George's 88-year history, Jango Baie was half a length further back in fourth.

Redknapp, former boss of West Ham and Tottenham – and an FA Cup winner with Portsmouth in 2008 – said: "Today, we have gone into the Champions League. We got in the Premier League, which was fantastic, but today we were taking on the Real Madrids and the Barcelonas.

"Everyone was jumping on me at the end and I thought, "I don't know if I've won!' What a race, what a finish and what courage he showed."

Trainer Ben Pauling, like Jones and Redknapp enjoying the high point of his burgeoning career, will now aim the seven-year-old at the Cheltenham Gold Cup, for which he is a general 8-1 (from 25-1).

Sir Gino reverted from fences to land the Ladbrokes Christmas Hurdle – his six-length beating of reigning Champion Hurdler Golden Ace was also achieved in a course-record time – and Nicky Henderson's unbeaten five-year-old is the 13-8 favourite to take the popular mare's crown at Cheltenham in the spring.

Sir Gino's owners, Joe and Marie Donnelly, also won the Grade One Ladbrokes Kauto Star Novices' Chase, with the Willie Mullins-trained Kitzbuhel.

BOXING CLEVER The Jukebox Man (centre) just gets up to win the King George VI Chase for (inset) owner Harry Redknapp and jockey Ben Jones

CHEPSTOW SKYSPORTSRACING

Premier Raceday

THE SCOUT

12.00 Mossy Fen Road
12.30 Razzle Dazzle Boy
1.05 Jour D'Evasion
1.40 MACKTOAD (nb)
2.10 Ramo
2.50 Intense Raffles
3.25 Ben Solo

12.00 NOVICES' HURDLE (GBB RACE)
£9,476 (Class 3)2m 16yds (11 declared)

1	144-311	**SPECTACULARSUNRISE (20) (D)** N & W Twiston-Davies 5 11-10	**S Twiston-Davies**	★134
2	1/19-1	● **MOSSY FEN ROAD (30) (D)** Harry Derham 5 11-6	**Paul O'Brien**	122
3	23/5-0	**AHANAGLOGH (22)** F O'Brien 6 11-0	**J Hogan**	79
4	23-3	**COULD BE YOU (14)** R Potter 5 11-0	**H Kimber**	101
5		**GALASHIELS (F147) (F)** N Henderson 6 11-0	**N De Boinville**	–
6	5-ULP	**GETAWAY SAM (21)** M Sheppard 5 11-0	**N Fox(5)**	78
7	F/23-L	**HILLWALK (26)** N Mulholland 5 11-0	**C O'Farrell**	111
8	42-35	**PHINEAS BUNCE (22)** D Skelton 4 11-0	**T Durrell**	112
9	553-189	**STAY HOPEFUL (8)** Henry Oliver 5 11-0	**Lee Edwards**	74
10	F-65	**STONE COLD (58)** M Sheppard 4 11-0	**T Bellamy**	–
11	182-63	**TENNESSEE TANGO (22)** J Tizzard 5 11-0	**B J Powell**	121

TONGUE STRAP: No. 11.
SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 2, 1.

SP FORECAST: 6-4 Galashiels, 5-2 Spectacularsunrise, 3 Mossy Fen Road, 10 Tennessee Tango, 14 Phineas Bunce, 16 Hillwalk, 33 Stone Cold, 50 Could Be You, 100 Others.

2024: Julius Des Pictons 5-11-6, Gavin Sheehan Evens Fav (J Snowden), 11 ran.

12.30 CORAL HANDICAP HURDLE
£8,714 (4) 2m 16yds (13)

1	LF50-P1	**KAMAXOS (40) (D)** C Longsdon 8 12-1	**D McConville(7)**	113
2	439-452	**CHEESY ICON (33)** Mrs M Rowley 5 11-12	**Shane Quinlan(3)**	111
3	6422-74	**ZAMBEZI FIX (18) (C&D)** B J Llewellyn 10 11-10	**G Sheehan**	115
4	7621-7	**CLOSE COMBAT (27)** N Hawke 4 11-10	**J M Davies**	106
5	218-P35	**KNIGHT TEMPLAR (22) (D)** R Stephens 4 11-8	**S Bowen**	113
6	833-P31	**OAKLEY (32)** E Williams 7 11-8	**E Collier(5)**	112
7	36102-5	● **RAZZLE DAZZLE BOY (78) (D)** T Vaughan 5 11-7	**Mr E Vaughan(7)**	114
8	6451-05	**ACTIVIST (27) (D)** D Pipe 6 11-7	**J Tudor**	116
9	76/4F1-L	**ANOTHER FINE MESS (39) (D)** J Scott 6 11-3	**L Williams**	114
10	3-P417P	**GOWER SPIRIT (8)** M Sheppard 5 10-13	**T Bellamy**	109
11	224377	**GAVIN (32) (D)** M Bowen 7 10-6	**S Fenelon(5)**	★118
12	3L-7684	**ESTATE PLANNING (24)** B J Llewellyn 4 10-5	**Lee Edwards**	114
13	513/574	**COGITAL (24) (D)** B J Llewellyn 10 10-4	**S Twiston-Davies**	105

VISOR: No. 8 TONGUE STRAP: No. 11 CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 3, 10, 12, 13
HOOD: Nos. 1, 2, 9.
SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 8, 9, 4, 10, 1, 7, 3.

SP FORECAST: 3 Oakley, 4 Kamaxos, 9-2 Cheesy Icon, 8 Razzle Dazzle Boy, 12 Knight Templar, Activist, 14 Estate Planning, Another Fine Mess, Zambezi Fix, 16 Others.

2024: Castelfort 4-12-0, David Noonan 12-1 (Mrs J Williams), 14 ran.

1.05 CORAL HANDICAP CHASE (GBB RACE)
£8,978 (4) 2m 16yds (7)

1	2215-51	● **JOUR D'EVASION (28)** H Daly 6 12-2	**S Twiston-Davies**	124
2	74232/3-	**STORMINHOME (437)** D Skelton 8 11-13	**K Woods**	–
3	1112-L1	**SIAM PARK (40) (D)** J Tizzard 6 11-10	**B J Powell**	122
4	9P311-6	**BALLYBREEZE (41) (C&D)** S Drinkwater 9 11-9	**S Bowen**	122
5	P/421-62	**HEADS OR HARPS (26) (D) (T)** L Russell & M Scudamore 8 11-6	**D R Fox**	★128
6	81P1-22	**PASSING KATE (28) (C)** M Sheppard 8 11-2	**N Fox(5)**	125
7	11222-4	**IDEALLKO (77) (D)** E Williams 7 10-5	**Isabel Williams**	122

TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 1, 3.
SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 5, 7, 1, 6, 3.

SP FORECAST: 5-2 Siam Park, 3 Jour D'Evasion, 5 Ballybreeze, 7 Passing Kate, Storminhome, 8 Heads Or Harps, 12 Ideallko.

2024: David's Well 5-11-7, Freddie Gordon(5) 5-2 Fav (C Gordon), 8 ran.

1.40 CORAL FINALE JUVENILE HURDLE 3YO
£47,552 (1) 2m 16yds (6) ITV1

1	11	● **MACKTOAD (22) (D)** 11 3	**C Quinn**	128	Runs: 2	Wins: 2(S,GS)		£17,224	Trainer: G & J Moore	Owner: Tsg Partnership
2	2-3	**KALDOUN DES ROCS (22)** 11 0	**T Durrell**	126	Runs: 2		Places: 2	£13,607	Trainer: D Skelton	Owner: Eventist Group Limited
3	41	**KLYCOT (9)** 11 0	**J Quinlan**	124	Runs: 2	Wins: 1(S)		£6,286	Trainer: R Bandey	Owner: Les Amis De Cedric
4	1	**SONIC PIONEER (33) (D)** 11 0	**S Bowen**	★130	Runs: 1	Wins: 1(G)		£4,901	Trainer: M Keighley	Owner: Redknapp, Salters & Powell
5	1-	**MANLAGA (287) (F)** 10 12	**N De Boinville**	126	Runs: 1	Wins: 1(S)		£23,570	Trainer: N Henderson	Owner: Mr John P McManus
6	41	**TENTER LE TOUT (34)** 10 7	**G Sheehan**	120	Runs: 2	Wins: 1(GS)		£5,184	Trainer: Chester Williams	Owner: Mr Ron Watts

TONGUE STRAP: No. 2 HOOD: No. 2.
SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 3, 1, 5.

SP FORECAST: Evens Macktoad, 3 Manlaga, 13-2 Kaldoun Des Rocs, 8 Sonic Pioneer, 10 Tenter Le Tout, 20 Klycot.

2024: Nietzsche Has 11-5, Ludovic Philipperon 11-10 Fav (Marcel Roland), 9 ran.

GUIDE: Bought privately for 125,000 euros after winning an AQPS race at Vichy (1m4f, gd-sft), Macktoad made a sparkling jumping debut at Sandown (2m, sft) and shot to prominence in the ante-post Triumph Hurdle market. **MANLAGA** is also towards the head of the betting for the juvenile championship and with Nicky Henderson throwing the Auteuil (1m7f, hvy) winner straight into this sort of company on her British bow, the hint must be taken. Kaldoun Des Rocs was just over four lengths adrift of Macktoad at Sandown, although he is 3lb better off now so could close the gap a bit.

2.10 HANDICAP HURDLE (GBB RACE)
£15,609 (2) 2m 7f 131yds (10) ITV1

1	01/521-5	**SANTOS BLUE (28) (C,D)** 8 12 0	**B Sutton(5)**	140	Runs: 22	Wins: 7(S,GS)	Places: 5	£69,764	Trainer: O Murphy	Owner: Mr N Sutton
2	03L95-6	**CREBILLY (49)** 8 11 1	**Jonjo O'Neill Jr**	139	Runs: 18	Wins: 3(S,GS)	Places: 6	£79,850	Trainer: J & A O'Neill	Owner: Mr John P McManus
3	52119-1	**KEABLE (29) (D)** 8 11 0	**C Pritchard(3)**	140	Runs: 12	Wins: 3(S)	Places: 2	£36,602	Trainer: P Hobbs & J White	Owner: Mr M Roberts
4	3612-56	**ROYAL RAMBLER (28) (C,F)** 5 10 12	**G Sheehan**	137	Runs: 6	Wins: 1(S)	Places: 2	£10,215	Trainer: E Lavelle	Owner: Bryan & Philippa Burrough
5	7111-34	**KING OF THE LAKE (34)** 7 10 9	**C Bament(7)**	★144	Runs: 16	Wins: 3(S,GS,G)	Places: 5	£33,042	Trainer: J Scott	Owner: Lake Side Racing
6	F23L-22	**AMBION VIEW (34)** 6 10 9	**B J Powell**	139	Runs: 10	Wins: 1(GS)	Places: 4	£15,480	Trainer: J Tizzard	Owner: Mr O C R Wynne & Mrs S J Wynne
7	813-00L	**PATRIOTIK (42) (D)** 6 10 7	**Isabel Williams**	142	Runs: 17	Wins: 3(S,GS)	Places: 5	£48,074	Trainer: E Williams	Owner: Mrs Janet Davies
8	32P/6L7-	● **RAMO (302)** 8 10 5	**C Deutsch**	123	Runs: 17	Wins: 3(S,GS)	Places: 5	£67,505	Trainer: V Williams	Owner: C B Compton & L Di Franco
9	423-11L	**DOCTOR KILDARE (29)** 5 10 4	**S Twiston-Davies**	140	Runs: 9	Wins: 3(S,G)	Places: 1	£18,806	Trainer: S Thomas	Owner: Walters Plant Hire Ltd
10	P4PL-08	**CLASSIC CONCORDE (21) (C&D)** 12 10 2	**T Durrell**	143	Runs: 77	Wins: 12(F,S,GS,G)	Places: 12	£87,141	Trainer: D Brace	Owner: Mr David Brace

VISOR: No. 9 TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 1, 5, 9 CHEEK PIECES: No. 10.
SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 10, 2, 9, 3, 5, 7, 8, 4, 1.

SP FORECAST: 4 Keable, 5 Doctor Kildare, 11-2 Crebilly, 6 Ambion View, 7 Royal Rambler, Santos Blue, 8 Patriotik, 12 King Of The Lake, 14 Others.

2024: Woodie Flash 6-12-0, Sean Bowen 4-1 (O Murphy), 8 ran.

GUIDE: Doctor Kildare was too bad to be true when finishing a well-beaten third at Doncaster (3m, gd-sft) and it is far too soon to be writing him off. Regardless, **KEABLE** produced a career-best victory when making a winning return at Newbury (3m, sft) and a 5lb rise could prove to be lenient. Ambion View has filled the runner-up berth on his last two outings and is forecast to be in the mix once more, along with Crebilly, who is entitled to build on his reappearance at Aintree (3m1f, gd-sft).

2.50 CORAL WELSH GRAND NATIONAL
£96,815 (1) 3m 6f 136yds (19) ITV1

1	902P-38	● **INTENSE RAFFLES (28)** 7 12 0	**Bryony Frost**	158	Runs: 18	Wins: 6(S,G)	Places: 3	£348,644	Trainer: T Gibney (IRE)	Owner: Mr Simon Munir/mr Isaac Souede
2	1311-1P	**HAITI COULEURS (35)** 8 11 13	**S Bowen**	154	Runs: 15	Wins: 7(S,GS,G)	Places: 5	£334,595	Trainer: R Curtis	Owner: Conyers, McDermott And Prowting
3	3P/111-2	**MR VANGO (21) (D)** 9 11 11	**J Tudor**	160	Runs: 13	Wins: 6(S,GS)	Places: 2	£243,378	Trainer: S Bradstock	Owner: Cracker and Smodge Partnership
4	PO/PP-PP	**NASSALAM (41) (C&D)** 8 11 4	**C Quinn**	–	Runs: 25	Wins: 7(S,GS)	Places: 3	£195,529	Trainer: G & J Moore	Owner: John and Yvonne Stone
5	241P6-P	**MONBEG GENIUS (21) (C)** 9 11 3	**Jonjo O'Neill Jr**	156	Runs: 20	Wins: 6(S,GS,G)	Places: 4	£116,846	Trainer: J & A O'Neill	Owner: Martin Tedham & Wasdell Properties Ltd
6	4225-01	**ROCK MY WAY (35)** 7 10 13	**B J Powell**	160	Runs: 21	Wins: 4(S,G)	Places: 6	£132,147	Trainer: J Tizzard	Owner: J P Romans & Nick Case
7	4112-5P	**TANGANYIKA (21)** 7 10 13	**C Deutsch**	159	Runs: 25	Wins: 6(S,GS)	Places: 3	£124,812	Trainer: V Williams	Owner: Mrs C S Wilson
8	L3159-1	**UNCLE BERT (21)** 8 10 9(4ex)	**S Twiston-Davies**	★162	Runs: 23	Wins: 6(S)	Places: 4	£104,289	Trainer: N & W Twiston-Davies	Owner: James & Jean Potter Ltd
9	1112-31	**O'CONNELL (21)** 9 10 9(4ex)	**D McMenamin**	157	Runs: 21	Wins: 6(S,GS)	Places: 5	£115,874	Trainer: J Parkinson & S Smith	Owner: Mr R Peters And Mr T Ford
10	L21P8-2	**COLLECTORS ITEM (21)** 8 10 8	**K Brogan**	160	Runs: 20	Wins: 4(S,GS,G)	Places: 6	£75,701	Trainer: J & A O'Neill	Owner: Jackdaws Antiques
11	23/L30-3	**GIT MAKER (46)** 9 10 6	**G Sheehan**	144	Runs: 20	Wins: 7(S,GS,G)	Places: 7	£98,400	Trainer: J Snowden	Owner: Sheep As A Lamb Syndicate
12	3421L-2	**DEAFENING SILENCE (28)** 8 10 5	**T Durrell**	161	Runs: 12	Wins: 4(S,GS)	Places: 3	£76,047	Trainer: D Skelton	Owner: My Racing Manager Friends
13	21/26-01	**JUBILEE EXPRESS (21) (C)** 8 10 3(4ex)	**K Woods**	158	Runs: 14	Wins: 3(S,GS)	Places: 5	£72,406	Trainer: S Thomas	Owner: Walters Plant Hire Ltd
14	8/PLFP-P	**WHERE IT ALL BEGAN (41)** 9 10 2	**C O'Farrell**	78	Runs: 23	Wins: 2(S)	Places: 7	£82,525	Trainer: G Elliott (IRE)	Owner: Patrick & Scott Bryceland,mcneill Fami
15	2/1LP3-1	**LIVIN ON LUCO (41)** 7 10 2	**C Pritchard(3)**	155	Runs: 13	Wins: 3(S,GS)	Places: 5	£31,561	Trainer: P Hobbs & J White	Owner: The Philip Hobbs Racing Partnership
16	P28P-31	**DOM OF MARY (28)** 9 10 2	**R McLernon**	158	Runs: 26	Wins: 6(S,GS,G)	Places: 5	£83,989	Trainer: James Owen	Owner: Mr P J Cave
17	6-1L812	**HUNG JURY (21)** 10 10 2	**T Bellamy**	156	Runs: 28	Wins: 7(S,GS,G)	Places: 5	£29,560	Trainer: M Keighley	Owner: Martin Keighley Racing Club
18	027277	**BEAUFORT SCALE (27)** 6 10 2	**P Hanlon(5)**	152	Runs: 18	Wins: 2(GS)	Places: 4	£21,954	Trainer: G Elliott (IRE)	Owner: Mr Ed Mulligan
19	L/6PP-46	**PATS FANCY (21) (C)** 10 10 2	**J Brace(5)**	144	Runs: 22	Wins: 3(S,GS)	Places: 4	£34,768	Trainer: R Curtis	Owner: Hydes,mcdermott,spencer,frobisher & Le

BLINKERS: Nos. 4, 6, 10, 14, 15 TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 3, 5, 6, 18
CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 3, 5, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19.
SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 10, 12, 16, 11, 2, 17, 1, 13, 15, 5, 3, 4, 9, 19, 6, 7, 8, 14.

SP FORECAST: 9-2 Jubilee Express, 6 Rock My Way, Git Maker, 7 Mr Vango, 8 O'Connell, Haiti Couleurs, 12 Collectors Item, 14 Others.

2024: Val Dancer 7-10-6, Charlie Hammond 8-1 (Mrs M Rowley), 15 ran.

GUIDE: Jubilee Express has been the subject of plenty of support after winning the Welsh Grand National Trial here (3m, gd-sft) and a 4lb penalty for that success may not be enough to stop him from going close. **UNCLE BERT** is due to go up 8lb after winning at Aintree (2m4f, sft) so he is well handicapped, despite his penalty. If he stays the trip at the first attempt, he could spring a surprise. Nassalam is back to the same mark off which he stormed to victory in 2023 (hvy) and must be considered, even though he has completed the course only once since and was pulled up at Cheltenham (3m3f, sft) last time out.

3.25 CORAL HANDICAP CHASE
£18,210 (2) 2m 3f 98yds (8) ITV1

1	L411-32	**DONNACHA (22) (C&D)** 7 12 0	**J M Davies**	136	Runs: 17	Wins: 5(S,GS)	Places: 8	£52,395	Trainer: N Hawke	Owner: Mrs Marilyn Jane Martin
2	L11P-7L	**WESTERN GENERAL (29)** 7 11 13	**B J Powell**	137	Runs: 18	Wins: 4(S,G)	Places: 4	£34,537	Trainer: J Tizzard	Owner: Brocade Racing
3	14/2PP-1	**TOSS OF A COIN (21) (C)** 7 11 12	**J Tidball(5)**	132	Runs: 11	Wins: 4(S,GS)	Places: 2	£19,281	Trainer: A Jones	Owner: Mrs Kathy Stuart
4	123-12L	**ROYAL JEWEL (22) (C)** 6 11 11	**C Pritchard(3)**	133	Runs: 16	Wins: 3(S,GS)	Places: 7	£39,911	Trainer: P Hobbs & J White	Owner: Mr R M Penny
5	228-512	● **BEN SOLO (21) (C&D)** 6 11 9	**J Brace(5)**	138	Runs: 12	Wins: 3(S,GS)	Places: 4	£20,575	Trainer: R Curtis	Owner: Mr David McDermott
6	23P4PP-	**GALOP DE CHASSE (252)** 9 11 6	**C Deutsch**	113	Runs: 27	Wins: 4(S,GS)	Places: 7	£88,048	Trainer: V Williams	Owner: The Winter Partnership
7	15-068L	**DR T J ECKLEBURG (14) (C)** 7 11 5	**C Ring**	132	Runs: 33	Wins: 6(S,GS)	Places: 7	£102,888	Trainer: E Williams	Owner: Mrs Janet Davies
8	P-34L33	**LUNAR DISCOVERY (21)** 8 10 13	**Charlie Price(3)**	★139	Runs: 20	Wins: 4(S,GS)	Places: 5	£35,865	Trainer: R L Llewellyn	Owner: Kevin & Anne Glastonbury

TONGUE STRAP: No. 2 CHEEK PIECES: No. 3.
SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 5, 1, 7, 6, 8, 4, 3, 2.

SP FORECAST: 7-4 Ben Solo, 3 Donnacha, 5 Toss Of A Coin, 8 Lunar Discovery, 10 Royal Jewel, 12 Galop De Chasse, 14 Western General, 25 Dr T J Eckleburg.

2024: Lowry's Bar 6-11-7, Micheal Nolan 11-10 Fav (P Hobbs & J White), 7 ran.

GUIDE: Venetia Williams has a good record in this race so Galop De Chasse is worth a look on his comeback, but of more interest is **DONNACHA.** Nigel Hawke's C&D winner found only an unexposed novice half a length too good at Exeter (2m3f, gd-sft) and is fancied to go one better. Toss Of A Coin made the best possible start to life with Alan Jones when going in here (3m, gd-sft) and the drop in distance isn't too much of a concern. Ben Solo was turned over at odds-on when attempting to complete a C&D (gd-sft) brace

TRACK FACTS: GOING: Good to Soft. Left Handed. **TOP TRACK JOCKEY (2020-25):** Gavin Sheehan 22% Strike rate. **TOP TRACK TRAINER (2020-25):** E Williams 10% Strike rate. **FIRST TIME:** 2.50 Nassalam (wind surgery), 12.30 Estate Planning (cheek pieces), Gower Spirit (cheek pieces). **BEATEN FAVOURITES:** 2.10 Ambion View(hcp hdl), Doctor Kildare(hcp hdl). 2.50 Mr Vango(hcp ch). 3.25 Ben Solo(hcp ch). **LONGEST TRAVELLER: Where It All Began** (2.50), **Beaufort Scale** (2.50), **Intense Raffles** (2.50) Ireland; **Heads Or Harps** (1.05) 386 miles. **STABLE SWITCH:** 12.00 **Stone Cold** from S Crawford in Ireland to M Sheppard. 1.40 **Manlaga** from M Rolland in France to N Henderson.

WOLVERHAMPTON SSR

4.00 BETMGM HANDICAP (DIV 1)

£3,140 (Class 6) 7f 36yds (11 declared)

1	(7)	822241	**FLOWSTATE (11) (D)** D O'Meara 4 9-11	**D Nolan**	73
2	(1)	302583	**BASS PLAYER (14) (C,D)** K Frost 6 9-9	**J Mitchell**	73
3	(3)	L22L20	**SUPER HIT (10) (D)** Darryll Holland 4 9-8	**K O'Neill**	★76
4	(10)	L46536	● **NACHO NACHO NACHO (36)** Jack Morland 3 9-7	**C Shepherd**	73
5	(8)	51-LLLL	**ROGUE SOLDIER (187) (C)** M Young 5 9-6	**C Hutchinson**	48
6	(4)	134355	**MASQOOL (14) (C,D)** H Evans 7 9-5	**D Costello**	70
7	(6)	79646L	**ACT OF VIOLENCE (19)** D Loughnane 4 9-2	**R Scott**	73
8	(5)	431L50	**TOUSSAROK (23) (C&D)** A Carroll 7 9-2	**Jack Doughty**	75
9	(11)	3L5L84	**COURT OF SESSION (7)** P McEntee 6 8-13	**Doubtful**	
10	(9)	074186	**VON KROLOCK (8) (C&D)** James Owen 6 8-11	**H Davies**	74
11	(2)	L0578L	**POET (37)** S Dixon 6 8-4	**T Heard**	68

BLINKERS: No. 10 VISOR: Nos. 1, 4, 9 TONGUE STRAP: No. 3 CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 3, 6.

SP FORECAST: 5-2 Flowstate, 10-3 Bass Player, 13-2 Von Krolock, 8 Super Hit, Nacho Nacho Nacho, Masqool, 10 Act Of Violence, 12 Toussarok, 25 Others.

2024: No corresponding race.

4.30 BETMGM HANDICAP (DIV 2)

£3,140 (6) 7f 36yds (10)

1	(5)	168007	**BLUE ECLIPSE (32) (D)** J Tate 3 9-9	**R Hornby**	56
2	(3)	7222L5	**DAPPER GEE GEE (21) (D)** A Carroll 3 9-9	**W Carson**	74
3	(7)	865136	**GROUNDSMAN (25) (C&D)** M Loughnane 3 9-7	**B Loughnane**	72
4	(6)	0-LL913	**NO KNEE NEVER (9) (C)** James Owen 4 9-6	**S James**	73
5	(10)	83L741	**HARBOUR VISION (7) (C&D)** S Dixon 10 9-5	**K O'Neill**	73
6	(2)	057557	**AMAYSMONT (14) (C&D)** K Frost 8 9-4	**A Voikhansky**	68
7	(9)	852232	**BLUE EMPRESS (25) (F)** A Watson 3 9-2	**Harry Vigors(7)**	75
8	(8)	5LU531	**FULFORD CROSS (10) (D)** D M Simcock 3 9-1	**L Morris**	73
9	(1)	L44760	**FISTRAL BEACH (15) (C&D)** J Mackie 4 8-12	**F Marsh**	71
10	(4)	735335	● **BAD HABITS (9)** R Carr 3 8-9	**JP Sullivan**	★76

BLINKERS: Nos. 5, 7 TONGUE STRAP: No. 4 CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 3, 4.

SP FORECAST: 5-2 Harbour Vision, 4 No Knee Never, Blue Empress, 6 Fulford Cross, 8 Dapper Gee Gee, 12 Groundsman, 14 Bad Habits, Amaysmont, 25 Others.

2024: No corresponding race.

5.00 EBF NOVICE STAKES (GBB RACE) 2YO

£3,402 (5) 7f 36yds (7)

1	(3)	4	**BIG MOONRISE (15)** P Evans 9-7	**P Cosgrave**	46
2	(1)		**CAVIAR COWBOY** J Fanshawe 9-7	**G Wood**	–
3	(7)	26	● **DELINQUENT (111)** K R Burke 9-7	**S James**	84
4	(4)	25	**MAN OF VISION (57)** C Appleby 9-7	**B Loughnane**	★89
5	(5)		**QUICK QUASAR** A Watson 9-7	**H Doyle**	–
6	(6)	2	**GET AN ATTITUDE (18)** K R Burke 9-2	**P-L Jamin**	72
7	(2)	06	**LIFE AFTER LOVE (9)** Ollie Sangster 9-2	**N Currie**	63

TONGUE STRAP: No. 4 HOOD: No. 7.

SP FORECAST: 2 Man Of Vision, 9-4 Delinquent, 7-2 Get An Attitude, 13-2 Quick Quasar, 10 Caviar Cowboy, 25 Life After Love, 33 Big Moonrise.

2024: Enacting 9-7, Daniel Muscutt 6-5 Fav (J Fanshawe), drawn (5), 12 ran.

TRACK FACTS: GOING: Standard. Left Handed. **TOP TRACK JOCKEY (2020-25):** Luke Morris 12% Strike rate. **TOP TRACK TRAINER (2020-25):** A Carroll 9% Strike rate. **FIRST TIME:** 4.00 Nacho Nacho Nacho (visor), 5.00 Life After Love (hood), 5.30 Nekazari (cheek pieces, tongue strap), 6.30 Kolsai (cheek pieces), 7.00 Summer Evening (blinkers). **BEATEN FAVOURITES:** 5.00 Get An Attitude. 5.30 Grand Harbour(hcp), Nekazari(hcp). 6.00 Tewkesbury. 6.30 Advancing(hcp), Sheikh Raj(hcp). 7.00 R P Mcmurphy(hcp). 7.30 Zooks(hcp). 8.00 Water Of Leith(hcp). **DRAW:** Little effect. **LONGEST TRAVELLER: Krissy** (5.30), **Alnayef** (7.30), **Water Of Leith** (8.00) 285 miles. **STABLE SWITCH:** 4.30 **Blue Eclipse** from Alice Haynes to J Tate. 5.30 **Grand Harbour** from Sir M Prescott to Joe Ponting. 6.00 **Lady Dora Mae** from J A Stack in Ireland to G Boughey. 6.30 **Advancing** from J Ferguson to M Botti. 8.00 **Fletchers Dream** from A Brown to D Wingrove.

5.30 MIDNITE HANDICAP

£3,140 (6) 1m 4f 51yds (11)

1	(6)	620L11	**MR ZIPPI (8) (D,F)** Sara Ender 6 10-3	**J Peate**	63
2	(8)	166483	**MOON OVER THE SEA (28) (C&D)** A Carroll 6 9-8	**Jack Doughty**	64
3	(2)	525351	**THREE ON THURSDAY (12)** A Carroll 3 9-8	**C Fallon**	63
4	(11)	9622L8	**GUINNESS LAD (26)** N Mulholland 5 9-8	**L Morris**	★69
5	(3)	65L548	**SISTERANDBROTHER (9) (C&D)** S A Harris 7 9-6	**L Edmunds**	64
6	(5)	647957	**STARFIGHTER (28) (C&D)** M Loughnane 9 9-5	**E Greatrex**	66
7	(1)	0-L078	● **NEKAZARI (25)** G Boughey 3 9-5	**B Loughnane**	25
8	(10)	5PPL12	**KRISSY (12) (T)** J Goldie 4 9-5	**C Hardie**	64
9	(4)	757325	**VIRTUAL HUG (J54) (C&D)** Mrs N Evans 7 9-4	**H Doyle**	65
10	(9)	274048	**BLOODHOUND (24)** S Lycett 5 9-4	**R Hornby**	63
11	(7)	5323LL	**GRAND HARBOUR (119)** Joe Ponting 3 9-4	**K O'Neill**	65

TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 7, 9, 10 CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 7, 11 HOOD: No. 4.

SP FORECAST: 5-2 Mr Zippi, 3 Three On Thursday, 9-2 Krissy, 7 Moon Over The Sea, 10 Nekazari, 14 Grand Harbour, Virtual Hug, 20 Bloodhound, 25 Others.

2024: Moon Over The Sea 5-9-6, Jack Doughty(3) 8-1 (A Carroll), drawn (9), 12 ran.

6.00 EBF NOVICE STAKES 2YO

£5,211 (4) 1m 142yds (13)

1	(10)	7	**EMPIRICAL (15)** E Walker 9-7	**Jack Doughty**	39
2	(1)	9	**JERSEYGEORDIE (5)** J Osborne 9-7	**R Hornby**	47
3	(11)		**LORCA'S WALTZ** W Haggas 9-7	**C Fallon**	–
4	(3)	47	**MYTHICAL BAY (30)** A Balding 9-7	**C Hutchinson**	68
5	(7)		● **OBJECTOR** G Scott 9-7	**C Shepherd**	–
6	(12)	88	**SAXOPHONIC (19)** K R Burke 9-7	**R Scott**	57
7	(13)	42	**TEWKESBURY (19)** S & E Crisford 9-7	**H Davies**	71
8	(4)	65	**TURTLE REEF (30)** H Palmer 9-7	**H Doyle**	70
9	(8)	0	**VON DUTCH (31)** K P De Foy 9-7	**D Keenan**	38
10	(2)	6	**WEDONTTELLTHETRUTH (21)** M Loughnane 9-7	**J Peate**	65
11	(9)	87	**CAMPEONA (17)** Sir M Prescott 9-2	**L Morris**	54
12	(6)	7	**LADY DORA MAE (55)** G Boughey 9-2	**B Loughnane**	★72
13	(5)	57	**QUEEN OF ASTOLAT (16)** C Fellowes 9-2	**Mikkel Mortensen(5)**	59

HOOD: Nos. 7, 13.

SP FORECAST: 2 Tewkesbury, 4 Lorca's Waltz, 13-2 Turtle Reef, 7 Lady Dora Mae, 8 Mythical Bay, Objector, 14 Empirical, 16 Saxophonic, 25 Others.

2024: Merchant 9-7, Cieren Fallon 10-11 Fav (W Haggas), drawn (4), 10 ran.

6.30 BETMGM HANDICAP

£4,972 (4) 1m 142yds (13)

1	(7)	757695	**SILVER SAMURAI (26)** M Botti 8 9-13	**L Catton(3)**	84
2	(2)	005891	**RAJAPOUR (12) (C&D,F)** D O'Meara 5 9-12	**D Nolan**	83
3	(4)	712	**FLAME OF FOREST (61)** K R Burke 3 9-12	**S James**	79
4	(13)	990L-LL	**KOLSAI (21)** R Hughes 5 9-12	**F Marsh**	72
5	(5)	L35714	**KINDEST NATION (30)** H Palmer 4 9-10	**C Fallon**	83
6	(3)	405L76	**FARASI LANE (21)** Dr R Newland & J Insole 7 9-10	**Charlie Bell(7)**	86
7	(9)	143376	**ADVANCING (84)** M Botti 3 9-9	**M Ghiani**	★87
8	(1)	423262	● **SHEIKH RAJ (19)** R Hughes 3 9-8	**B Loughnane**	85
9	(12)	233708	**THIS FARH (9)** D Loughnane 3 9-6	**R Scott**	85
10	(11)	691807	**PACKETOFBISCUITS (17) (C)** J Mackie 3 9-3	**L Morris**	81
11	(6)	10063L	**BOUBYAN (18)** M Appleby 3 9-2	**H Doyle**	83
12	(8)	0L8058	**ENTHUSED (7)** James Owen 8 8-13	**Mason Paetel(5)**	83
13	(10)	140603	**BOOK OF LIFE (21) (C&D)** P Morris 5 8-9	**JP Sullivan**	84

BLINKERS: Nos. 8, 10 VISOR: Nos. 1, 2, 5 TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 1, 12 CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 4, 9, 11, 12.

SP FORECAST: 5-2 Rajapour, 9-2 Sheikh Raj, 5 Flame Of Forest, 8 Silver Samurai, 10 Kindest Nation, Advancing, 12 Book Of Life, 16 Farasi Lane, Packetofbiscuits, 20 Others.

2024: No corresponding race.

THE SCOUT

4.00 Nacho Nacho Nacho
4.30 Bad Habits
5.00 Delinquent
5.30 Nekazari
6.00 Objector
6.30 SHEIKH RAJ (nap)
7.00 Mbappe
7.30 Alnayef
8.00 Zoulu Warrior

7.00 BETMGM HANDICAP

£3,140 (6) 1m 142yds (11)

1	(3)	8508L9	**FOOLS RUSH IN (14) (C&D)** R Carr 7 9-9	**JP Sullivan**	46
2	(1)	LLL337	● **MBAPPE (54)** M Loughnane 4 9-9	**B Loughnane**	70
3	(7)	153722	**DANEHILL STAR (142) (C&D)** A Carroll 4 9-7	**Jack Doughty**	68
4	(6)	6-LL9	**PACIFIC PRINCE (171)** J Bennett 4 9-7	**Laura Coughlan(3)**	61
5	(5)	914133	**THE DARK BARON (12) (C&D)** Kathy Turner 3 9-5	**B Ffrench-Davis(5)**	★72
6	(11)	6-7L	**SUMMER EVENING (12)** D Flood 3 9-2	**D Keenan**	61
7	(2)	4LL439	**LHEBAYEB (58) (C&D)** R J Price 7 9-2	**F Marsh**	69
8	(10)	0L3313	**R P MCMURPHY (8) (C&D)** M Appleby 3 9-2	**E Greatrex**	71
9	(8)	974772	**CHARLATAN (10) (C&D,F)** D M Simcock 5 9-0	**C Shepherd**	69
10	(9)	260390	**BOUJEE GOLD (26) (C&D)** A Carroll 6 8-12	**M Ghiani**	70
11	(4)	944300	**SUPERNOVA STEPS (9)** D Loughnane 4 8-9	**H Doyle**	65

BLINKERS: No. 6 VISOR: No. 1 TONGUE STRAP: No. 1.

SP FORECAST: 7-2 Charlatan, 4 The Dark Baron, R P Mcmurphy, 5 Danehill Star, 8 Mbappe, Lhebayeb, 16 Summer Evening, Supernova Steps, 20 Others.

2024: Forever Proud 4-9-4, Hector Crouch 5-2 Fav (James Owen), drawn (6), 9 ran.

7.30 MIDNITE HANDICAP

£3,140 (6) 1m 5f 219yds (11)

1	(7)	72L444	● **ALNAYEF (52) (T)** J Goldie 4 10-0	**Lauren Young(5)**	67
2	(10)	425539	**FLEUR DE MER (33) (C)** M Todhunter 5 9-12	**A Brookes(3)**	68
3	(2)	312392	**GRAND DUCHESS OLGA (37) (C&D,F)** J & S Birkett 5 9-11	**C R Lyons(7)**	67
4	(9)	L00LLL	**OVIEDO (7)** Alexandra Dunn 5 9-10	**F Marsh**	★70
5	(4)	333243	**DAARIS (16) (C&D)** K Frost 6 9-10	**J Mitchell**	69
6	(8)	257L14	**APPLEBLOSSOMWHITE (J23)** Lemos Souza 3 9-9	**L Edmunds**	61
7	(3)	477	**DOLLAR'S DREAM (26)** P Kirby 4 9-7	**C Hardie**	62
8	(6)	431333	**ZOOKS (5) (D)** I Williams 5 9-4	**B Loughnane**	68
9	(1)	127768	**BLACK SMOKE (24) (C&D)** M Loughnane 8 8-12	**J Dace(5)**	66
10	(5)	642834	**RAMPANT (9)** P Morris 5 8-11	**J Nicholls(5)**	67
11	(11)	64L531	**HIMSELF (33)** P Kirby 3 8-8	**L Morris**	64

BLINKERS: Nos. 5, 9 VISOR: No. 10 TONGUE: Nos. 6, 9 CHEEK: Nos. 1, 3, 6, 8.

SP FORECAST: 3 Himself, 4 Grand Duchess Olga, 5 Zooks, 6 Daaris, 8 Rampant, 10 Alnayef, Appleblossomwhite, 14 Dollar's Dream, 16 Others.

2024: No corresponding race.

8.00 JOIN THE MIDNITE MOVEMENT HANDICAP

£3,140 (6) 6f 20yds (13)

1	(11)	376811	**TWILIGHT MADNESS (19) (C&D)** S Hodgson 7 9-9	**A Rawlinson**	74
2	(8)	822921	● **ZOULU WARRIOR (9) (D,F)** H Main 3 9-9	**B Loughnane**	73
3	(5)	673421	**EARLY RELEASE (100) (D)** P Evans 3 9-9	**J Dace(5)**	★77
4	(4)	L46123	**SUB THIRTEEN (19) (D)** A Carroll 4 9-8	**W Carson**	73
5	(13)	L76766	**WATER OF LEITH (11) (C&D,F) (T)** J Goldie 7 9-7	**Lauren Young(5)**	69
6	(7)	760902	**MOOSTAR (23) (D,F)** James Owen 3 9-7	**P Cosgrave**	74
7	(1)	144887	**SIMPLY BLUE (7) (C)** James Owen 3 9-6	**P Bradley**	71
8	(9)	0-26676	**DARN HOT TIME (14)** Dr R Newland & J Insole 3 9-6	**H Doyle**	70
9	(12)	L-L8222	**CLOVER TIME (19)** M Appleby 3 9-5	**L Morris**	76
10	(3)	7-50504	**CALI CASE (19)** Joe Ponting 3 9-4	**Charlie Tucker(7)**	71
11	(10)	592100	**TEN CLUB (21) (D)** A Wintle 4 9-4	**F Marsh**	75
12	(6)	L51695	**FLETCHERS DREAM (19) (D)** D Wingrove 4 9-4	**W Cox**	72
13	(2)	631373	**EM JAY KAY (5) (C&D)** P McEntee 6 9-4	**Grace McEntee**	75

VISOR: No. 12 TONGUE: Nos. 6, 10 CHEEK: Nos. 2, 9, 13 HOOD: No. 8.

SP FORECAST: 9-2 Zoulu Warrior, 5 Twilight Madness, 6 Early Release, 13-2 Moostar, 7 Clover Time, 8 Sub Thirteen, Em Jay Kay, 14 Others.

2024: Havana Sky 3-9-13, Hector Crouch 15-8 Fav (E Dunlop), drawn (12), 12 ran.

WETHERBY RACINGTV

THE SCOUT

12.25 You Say Its Over
1.00 Alsakib
1.35 Grangeclare Diego
2.15 Warrior King
2.45 Doyen Du Bar
3.20 A Likeable Rogue

12.25 CONDITIONAL JOCKEYS' HANDICAP HURDLE

£3,697 (Class 5)3m 26yds (16 declared)

1	57L-832	**SHOESHINE BOY (26) (D)** D Whillans 9 12-0	**F Gordon**	98
2	2235-1L	**GEORDIE NIGHT (36)** N Kent 6 12-0	**T Broughton**	96
3	PP-P812	**GETAWAY MASTER (17) (F)** M Hammond 8 11-13	**J Thompson(6)**	100
4	14L8L6	**LITTLE SOIREE (29)** Olly Williams 7 11-11	**Beau Morgan**	90
5	2452-PP	**GLORY HIGHTS (27)** C Grant 9 11-6	**W Maggs**	99
6	42FL4L	**STAR VANTAGE (19)** R Menzies 8 11-5	**C Maggs**	★101
7	33L4-41	**CASTANEA BREEZE (23)** L Wadham 5 11-4	**B Bromley**	95
8	64-4714	**MOVEONBUY (17)** A Crook 5 11-0	**T Midgley**	96
9	66/P-558	**PERFECT POLI (159)** Lizzie Quinlan 7 10-10	**P J Kavanagh(3)**	89
10	6P-6P57	**KALO ATHENA (47)** J Moffatt 6 10-10	**L Norcei(10)**	90
11	556P-0	**WESTERDALE (29)** M Walford 6 10-8	**Jack Power**	46
12	6-L0L5	**LITTLE WREN (31)** D Skelton 5 10-4	**Harry Atkins(6)**	80
13	7PL-6P6	**SMART BUCKS (44)** P Kirby 5 10-4	**J Williamson**	96
14	464L-PL	**FANCY NANCY PANTS (28)** P Kirby 5 10-2	**L Scott**	98
15	2/PL9-PP	**WALK MY WAY (17)** M Hammond 7 10-2	**C Rabbitt**	84
16	434-L8P	● **YOU SAY ITS OVER (36)** M Hammond 7 10-2	**A Stevens**	–

BLINKERS: No. 15 TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 1, 2, 6, 9 CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16 HOOD: No. 11.

SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 3, 10, 8, 1.

SP FORECAST: 3 Castanea Breeze, 9-2 Getaway Master, 5 Shoeshine Boy, 6 Little Wren, 13-2 Geordie Night, 12 Glory Hights, 14 Star Vantage, 16 Kalo Athena, 20 Others.

2024: The Big Breac 7-11-1, Jack Power(3) 11-1 (J Parkinson & S Smith), 16 ran.

1.00 WILLIAM HILL NOVICES' HURDLE (GBB RACE)

£3,812 (4) 2m (12)

1		● **ALSAKIB (F84)** D McCain 5 11-0	**B Hughes**	–
2		**CHILLINGHAM (F81)** M Hammond 6 11-0	**R Mania**	–
3	6-14	**DARTMOUTH CASTLE (88)** D McCain 5 11-0	**T Gillard**	–
4	4-7L	**GREEDY SMITH (48)** J & A O'Neill 5 11-0	**B Macey(7)**	85
5	0	**LIBERTY COACH (21)** J & S Quinn 4 11-0	**Craig Nichol**	67
6	3/94-8L	**LITTLETOWN LAD (25)** S England 5 11-0	**T Midgley(3)**	79
7	F5	**MINSTREL KNIGHT (13)** E Bethell 4 11-0	**Sean Quinlan**	106
8	54-3	**NOSY NEIGHBOUR (32)** R Menzies 4 11-0	**N Moscrop**	101
9	3	**SOVEREIGNLIGHTCAFE (22)** M & D Easterby 4 11-0	**J Hamilton**	102
10	7/F8L6-L	**STEEL SOLDIER (22)** J Norton 5 11-0	**C Rabbitt(3)**	68
11	2-55	**TEA BOY (16)** P Atkinson 5 11-0	**C Bewley**	–
12	3	**TWO BROTHERS (21) (F)** M & D Easterby 7 11-0	**P W Wadge**	★125

TONGUE STRAP: No. 12 HOOD: No. 6.

SP FORECAST: 7-4 Alsakib, 5-2 Two Brothers, 7 Minstrel Knight, 8 Chillingham, 10 Tea Boy, Dartmouth Castle, 16 Nosy Neighbour, 20 Sovereignlightcafe, 33 Others.

2024: Maghlaak 5-11-0, Danny McMenamin 7-4 (A Keatley), 9 ran.

1.35 NOVICES' LIMITED HANDICAP CHASE (GBB RACE)

£6,337 (3) 3m 45yds (8)

1	1/313-P	**PIERROT JAGUEN (27)** O Murphy 6 11-10	**Sean Quinlan**	–
2	234-1L4	**I AM MAX (20)** A M Thomson 7 11-8	**P W Wadge**	126
3	212/52-F	**TOMMYS CHARM (60)** Kerry Lee 7 11-7	**L Harrison**	128
4	306-3L5	**CHASINGOUTTHEBLUES (39)** M Walford 6 11-6	**J Hamilton**	126
5	233-233	**AS LEGENDS HAVE IT (25)** B Pauling 6 11-6	**Beau Morgan(5)**	126
6	1L56-81	**ABOUTDAMNTIME (36)** O Greenall & J Guerriero 6 11-5	**Craig Nichol**	123
7	1P/3331-	● **GRANGECLARE DIEGO (286)** J R Barlow 7 11-1	**Mr Paddy Barlow(7)**	–
8	L3-3423	**FRISBY (39)** P Neville 7 10-12	**B Hughes**	★129

TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 6, 7, 8 CHEEK PIECES: Nos. 1, 5, 6, 8.

SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 6, 5, 4, 7, 2, 1, 3.

SP FORECAST: 11-4 Aboutdamntime, 4 Pierrot Jaguen, 9-2 Frisby, 11-2 As Legends Have It, 8 Tommys Charm, 10 Grangeclare Diego, Chasingouttheblues, 12 I Am Max.

2024: Grand Albert 6-10-11, Brian Hughes 15-8 Fav (D McCain), 4 ran.

2.15 JUVENILE HURDLE (GBB RACE) 3YO

£3,812 (4) 2m (9)

1	1	**INDIAN RIVER (36) (D,F)** A Keatley 11-7	**B Hughes**	★113
2	UL	**DIVISION DAY (23)** B Ellison 11-0	**Craig Nichol**	75
3		**JEDHI KNIGHT (F68) (T)** Harry Derham 11-0	**H Reed**	–
4		**KENTUCKY RIVER (F132)** O Murphy 11-0	**Sean Quinlan**	–
5	23	**LIGHTS GO DOWN (23)** M & D Easterby 11-0	**J Hamilton**	109
6	L	**SOME BOY ME (11)** T Easterby 11-0	**T Midgley(3)**	63
7		**SQUARE D'ALBONI (F63)** D Skelton 11-0	**C J Todd**	–
8		**TWILIGHT SAFARI (F70)** M Hammond 11-0	**C Bewley**	–
9		● **WARRIOR KING (F73)** D McCain 11-0	**T Gillard**	–

BLINKERS: No. 3.

SP FORECAST: 5-4 Square D'alboni, 7-2 Indian River, 5 Kentucky River, 8 Lights Go Down, 10 Twilight Safari, 12 Warrior King, 16 Jedhi Knight, 66 Division Day, 100 Some Boy Me.

2024: Hosaamm 11-0, Brian Hughes 8-11 Fav (A Keatley), 11 ran.

2.45 WILLIAM HILL CASTLEFORD HANDICAP CHASE

£15,843 (2) 1m 7f 36yds (6)

1	211F3/P	**HADDEX DES OBEAUX (43)** D McCain 8 12-0	**B Hughes**	–
2	119/842-	**MADARA (378)** D Skelton 6 11-6	**C J Todd**	156
3	6222-LL	**HOMME PUBLIC (28) (C&D)** O Greenall & J Guerriero 8 11-3	**Craig Nichol**	★157
4	143PL-5	**HARPER'S BROOK (22) (C&D)** D Skelton 9 10-13	**Harry Atkins(7)**	125
5	31121-3	● **DOYEN DU BAR (28) (F)** N Richards 9 10-12	**C Bewley**	153
6	37P-242	**TRAPRAIN LAW (20) (T)** L Russell & M Scudamore 7 10-10	**P W Wadge**	154

BLINKERS: No. 3 TONGUE STRAP: Nos. 3, 6 CHEEK PIECES: No. 4.

SOFT/HEAVY WINNERS: Nos. 5, 1, 4, 3, 2, 6.

SP FORECAST: 6-4 Madara, 11-4 Doyen Du Bar, 4 Traprain Law, 8 Haddex Des Obeaux, Homme Public, 25 Harper's Brook.

2024: Harper's Brook 8-11-8, Kielan Woods 9-4 (D Skelton), 4 ran.

3.20 OPEN NH FLAT RACE (GBB RACE)

£2,722 (5) 2m (15)

1	5-1	**AGENT ARGYLLE (236)** R Phillips 5 11-2	**F Lambert(3)**	–
2	4	● **A LIKEABLE ROGUE (41) (F)** John Dawson 4 11-2	**B Hughes**	★121
3	03	**AU PLAISIR (98)** R Menzies 4 11-2	**N Moscrop**	109
4		**EWDEN VALLEY** J & A O'Neill 4 11-2	**B Macey(7)**	–
5		**FULLYTHERMAL** D McCain 4 11-2	**T Gillard**	–
6		**GET ON SON** J Parkinson & S Smith 4 11-2	**P J Kavanagh**	–
7	4P-67	**GOOD BOY GRIFF (43)** G Hanmer 4 11-2	**J A Anderson(3)**	84
8	4	**HURLYBURLY (31)** J O'Keeffe 4 11-2	**Sean Quinlan**	98
9	4-	**INK BLACK HEART (345)** D Skelton 4 11-2	**L Harrison**	111
10		**KATAGAT** D Killahena & G McPherson 5 11-2	**N Slatter(3)**	–
11		**LOU DES BORDES** N Kent 4 11-2	**T Midgley(3)**	–
12		**MARBLE SKY** A Crook 4 11-2	**J Williamson(3)**	–
13		**ROCK ON RONNIE** O Murphy 4 11-2	**L Stones(3)**	–
14		**RUBINIO** O Greenall & J Guerriero 4 11-2	**Craig Nichol**	–
15	3	**STATIC CHARM (36)** M Hammond 4 11-2	**J Thompson(7)**	101

TONGUE STRAP: No. 3.

SP FORECAST: 10-3 A Likeable Rogue, 5 Rock On Ronnie, 8 Au Plaisir, 10 Static Charm, Ink Black Heart, Agent Argylle, 12 Rubinio, Katagat, Ewden Valley, 14 Others.

2024: Harbour Island 5-11-2, Brian Hughes 9-2 (O Murphy), 12 ran.

TRACK FACTS: GOING: Soft. Left Handed. **TOP TRACK JOCKEY (2020-25):** Brian Hughes 14% Strike rate. **TOP TRACK TRAINER (2020-25):** D Skelton 28% Strike rate. **FIRST TIME:** 1.00 Two Brothers (tongue strap), 1.35 Pierrot Jaguen (cheek pieces), Frisby (cheek pieces, tongue strap), 2.15 Jedhi Knight (blinkers), 12.25 Smart Bucks (cheek pieces), Kalo Athena (cheek pieces), Perfect Poli (cheek pieces, tongue strap), Westerdale (hood), Walk My Way (blinkers). **BEATEN FAVOURITES:** 12.25 Little Wren(hcp hdl). 1.35 Frisby(hcp ch), Pierrot Jaguen(hcp ch). 2.15 Jedhi Knight(hcp). 2.45 Madara(hcp ch). **LONGEST TRAVELLER: Traprain Law** (2.45) 216 miles. **STABLE SWITCH:** 1.00 **Alsakib** from A Balding to D McCain, **Chillingham** from E Bethell to M Hammond. 2.15 **Jedhi Knight** from J O'Keeffe to Harry Derham, **Kentucky River** from Ollie Sangster to O Murphy, **Square D'alboni** from R Beckett to D Skelton, **Twilight Safari** from Harry Eustace to M Hammond, **Warrior King** from Harry Charlton to D McCain. 3.20 **Agent Argylle** from Eamonn M Doyle to R Phillips, **Au Plaisir** from William Harvey to R Menzies, **Ink Black Heart** from T H Weston to D Skelton.

VITAL STATISTICS

IN-FORM TRAINERS (last 10 days) G Scott 83% (1 wins and 4 places from 6 runners), A M Thomson 80% (1/3/5), K R Burke 71% (1/4/7), W Haggas 71% (2/3/7), N Richards 64% (2/5/11), D M Simcock 60% (1/5/10), H Fry 60% (1/2/5), A Honeyball 58% (3/4/12), C Appleby 58% (6/1/12), D O'Meara 56% (3/2/9), A Carroll 50% (7/7/28), Lemos Souza 50% (2/2/8), Mrs J Williams 50% (2/1/6), R L Llewellyn 50% (1/1/4), Sir M Prescott 50% (2/1/6), T Easterby 50% (2/2/8).

IN-FORM JOCKEYS Freddie Keighley 75% (2 wins and 1 places from 4 runners), Sam James 70% (2/5/10), Jonjo O'Neill Jr 64% (6/3/14), Gavin Sheehan 63% (6/6/19), Tom Midgley 60% (1/2/5), Tristan Durrell 60% (2/7/15), David Nolan 54% (4/3/13), Callum Shepherd 50% (2/7/18), Craig Nichol 50% (4/5/18), Danny McMenamin 50% (2/8/20), Freddie Gordon 50% (4/1/10), Ryan Mania 50% (1/2/6).

RESULTS & PRICES FROM ALL 8 OF THE UK BOXING DAY MEETINGS

AINTREE: Good to soft-soft in places on chase course

12.00—ANALIESE (T Wynne, 10-3 2nd fav) 1; Hard Dealt (4-1) 2; Broomfield Aderra (9-4 fav) 3. H'cap 7 ran. 1¾l, shd. (Mrs M Rowley). Tote: £4.34; pl £2.30, £2.40. exacta: £15.50. trifecta: £46.90. CSF: £17.55.

12.30—PRAIRIE WOLF (J Tudor, 7-2) 1; Josh The Boss (9-4 fav) 2; Inedit Star (11-4 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 5 ran. 1½l, 17l. (J Parkinson & S Smith). Tote: £4.50; pl £2.00, £1.70. exacta: £13.20. trifecta: £35.50. CSF: £12.36.

1.05—IDAHO SUN (B Carver, 3-1 2nd fav) 1; Mydaddypaddy (8-13 fav) 2; The Last Cloud (18-1) 3. 6 ran. 3¼l, 8l. (H Fry). Tote: £4.10; pl £1.60, £1.20. exacta: £6.90. tricast: £22.22. trifecta: £34.90. CSF: £5.54. Non-runners: Diamond Hunter, Wahraan.

1.40—INDEEVAR BLEU (J Tudor, 9-2) 1; Serious Operator (16-1) 2; Florida Dreams (5-1) 3. H'cap 8 ran. 5½l, ½l. (O Murphy; 3-1 fav Bear Market). Tote: £5.50; pl £1.80, £2.40, £1.80. exacta: £57.60. tricast: £373.35. trifecta: £254.50. CSF: £67.12.

2.15—FORTUNATE MAN (Jonjo O'Neill Jr, 15-8 fav) 1; Kelce (7-2) 2; Duke Of Deception (12-1) 3. H'cap 8 ran. 3l, 12l. (J & A O'Neill). Tote: £2.88; pl £1.30, £1.70, £2.70. exacta: £11.10. tricast: £61.80. trifecta: £74.40. CSF: £9.81.

2.50—THROATLASH (B Hughes, 5-2 2nd fav) 1; Chuggy (4-7 fav) 2; Roysse (11-2) 3. H'cap 3 ran. 6½l, 1¼l. (D McCain). Tote: £3.50; exacta: £4.30. trifecta: £3.80. CSF: £4.50. Non-runner: Juby Ball.

3.25—NO WALKOVER (J Tudor, 2-1 2nd fav) 1; Grazeon Sunshine (12-1) 2; Wonder Flying (7-2) 3. 8 ran. 5l, 1¼l. (D Pipe; 6-4 fav Moments In Time). Tote: £3.00; pl £1.20, £2.70, £1.30. exacta: £22.60. trifecta: £85.70. CSF: £26.31.

Placepot: £62.90

(Race 1) 2, 3; (2) 4, 3; (3) 3, 4; (4) 3, 4, 6; (5) 3, 6, 1; (6) 4;

Quadpot: £15.60

FONTWELL: Good to soft-soft in places

11.57—BRADMAN (L Scott, 11-1) 1; Atlantic Power (4-1) 2; H'cap 5 ran. 2½l. (K Bishop; 15-8 fav Morning Mayhem). Tote: £13.40; pl £4.30, £1.70. exacta: £49.30. trifecta: £30.70. CSF: £51.73. Non-runner: Goguenard.

12.32—SUPERSTYLIN (F Gordon, 4-7 fav) 1; McGrath From Clune (6-1) 2; Jackeline (9-4 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 3 ran. 19l, 2l. (C Gordon). Tote: £1.58; exacta: £3.20. trifecta: £2.90. CSF: £3.76. Non-runner: Chankaya.

1.07—FORTUNE TIMMY (F Gordon, 5-6 fav) 1; Fashion Hunter (7-2) 2; Rathkenny (11-4 2nd fav) 3. 4 ran. 24l, 7½l. (C Gordon). Tote: £1.84; exacta: £3.40. trifecta: £4.60. CSF: £4.00. Non-runner: Fountains Blenhein.

1.42—KRUGER PARK (J Tidball, 3-1 2nd fav) 1; Jalisco Star (4-1) 2; Malago Rose (5-2 fav) 3. H'cap 6 ran. 1¼l, ¾l. (P Nicholls). Tote: £4.00; pl £1.90, £2.20. exacta: £14.00. trifecta: £32.20. CSF: £15.49.

2.17—GRAND CONQUEROR (C O'Farrell, 5-6 fav) 1; Risk It All (6-1) 2; Ami Bondhu (3-1 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 4 ran. 8l, 19l. (N Mulholland). Tote: £1.84; exacta: £3.80. trifecta: £8.80. CSF: £5.80.

2.52—ESPERTI (J Tidball, 11-2) 1; Record High (3-1 2nd fav) 2; Minella Kaiser (2-1 fav) 3. H'cap 6 ran. ½l, 7½l. (D Rees). Tote: £6.50; pl £2.20, £2.00. exacta: £20.00. trifecta: £49.10. CSF: £22.47.

3.27—HALF HOPING (J M Davies, 11-4 2nd fav) 1; Double The Dance (11-10 fav) 2; West Along (28-1) 2; 6 ran. 6l, dht. (N Gifford). Tote: Half Hoping £3.75; pl Half Hoping £1.80, West Along £2.70. exacta: Half Hoping, Double The Dance £2.10, Half Hoping, West Along £40.80. trifecta: Half Hoping, Double The Dance, West Along £40.60, Half Hoping, West Along, Double The Dance £93.80. CSF: Half Hoping, Double The Dance £3.03, Half Hoping, West Along £29.52.

Placepot: £118.70

(Race 1) 4, 6; (2) 2; (3) 1; (4) 1, 3; (5) 2; (6) 4, 1;

Quadpot: £13.60

KEMPTON: Good-good to soft in places

12.45—BARLOVENTO (S Bowen, 4-1 2nd fav) 1; Tapley (22-1) 2; Jasmine Bliss (22-1) 3. H'cap 10 ran. ¾l, ¾l. (O Murphy; 7-4 fav Noble Park). Tote: £5.30; pl £1.60, £4.00, £4.90. exacta: £91.80. tricast: £1742.00. trifecta: £1133.80. CSF: £85.76.

1.20—KITZBUHEL (P Townend, 13-8 fav) 1; Thomas Mor (12-1) 2; Wendigo (5-2 2nd fav) 3. 6 ran. 2¾l, 1l. (W P Mullins (IRE)). Tote: £2.63; pl £1.70, £4.40. exacta: £23.20. trifecta: £78.20. CSF: £19.20.

1.55—SIR GINO (N De Boinville, 4-7 fav) 1; Golden Ace (5-1) 2; Rubaud (16-1) 3. 6 ran. 6l, 3½l. (N Henderson). Tote: £1.58; pl £1.20, £1.90. exacta: £3.70. trifecta: £15.70. CSF: £4.03.

2.30—THE JUKEBOX MAN (B R Jones, 7-1) 1; Banbridge (16-1) 2; Gaelic Warrior (9-4 jt fav) 3. 8 ran. ns, ns. (B Pauling; 9-4 jtfav Jango Baie). Tote: £8.00; pl £1.60, £3.20, £1.40. exacta: £70.40. tricast: £332.67. trifecta: £325.40. CSF: £99.64.

3.05—KLUB DE REVE (Paul O'Brien, 7-4 fav) 1; Gnomon (28-1) 2; Jimbo Sport (11-1) 3. 11 ran. 10l, 3l. (Harry Derham). Tote: £2.75; pl £1.30, £6.00, £2.90. exacta: £51.20. trifecta: £339.70. CSF: £58.11. Non-runner: Kapability.

3.40—SURREY LORD (K Brogan, 9-1) 1; King Of The Road (12-1) 2; Kap Boy (15-2) 3. H'cap 10 ran. 1¼l, 12l. (T Lawes; 11-4 fav Onewaywest). Tote: £10.00; pl £2.30, £3.80, £2.40. exacta: £116.00. tricast: £853.06. trifecta: £741.90. CSF: £111.46. Non-runner: North Lodge.

Jackpot: £5,617.90

Placepot: £207.10

(Race 1) 7, 9, 5; (2) 3, 5; (3) 4, 6; (4) 8, 1, 4; (5) 6, 2, 5; (6) 11, 10, 8.

Quadpot: £17.60

MARKET RASEN: Good to soft

12.40—JAPETUS (D McMenamin, 13-8 2nd fav) 1; Quaviste (15-2) 2; Four Springs (5-4 fav) 3. 8 ran. 4l, nk. (N Richards). Tote: £2.63; pl £1.10, £1.50, £1.20. exacta: £17.30. trifecta: £31.80. CSF: £14.99.

1.15—KYKOROCK (T Durrell, 11-2) 1; Benmore (7-2 2nd fav) 2; Clap Of Thunder (15-8 fav) 3. H'cap 7 ran. 2¾l, 4¾l. (D Skelton). Tote: £6.50; pl £2.40, £2.20. exacta: £28.10. trifecta: £93.00. CSF: £25.99.

1.47—GOTTHEREINTHEEND (L Harrison, 8-1) 1; Welcheston Warrier (5-1) 2; Ballynoe Boy (9-2 jt 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 10 ran. 6¼l, 2l. (R L Llewellyn; 4-1 fav Gms Prince). Tote: £9.00; pl £2.40, £2.20, £2.10. exacta: £53.40. tricast: £206.08. trifecta: £291.00. CSF: £49.31. Non-runner: Celine Man.

2.22—ORANGE DIAMOND (J Andrews, 7-2 jt 2nd fav) 1; Alltalknoaction (6-1) 2; Delgany Deadline (4-1) 3. H'cap 8 ran. 1l, 17l. (T Ellis; 16-5 fav Hawkseye View). Tote: £4.50; pl £1.50, £1.60, £1.60. exacta: £26.50. tricast: £87.85. trifecta: £127.80. CSF: £25.57. Non-runner: Benny Baloo.

2.57—RED DELTA (J Andrews, 5-1 2nd fav) 1; Ivane (12-1) 2; Queens Wish (11-2) 3. H'cap 9 ran. 2½l, 16l. (Fiona Needham; 11-8 fav The Big Breac). Tote: £6.10; pl £1.80, £3.00, £1.90. exacta: £56.00. tricast: £345.52. trifecta: £338.30. CSF: £61.61. Non-runner: Ali Star Bert.

3.32—SMART DECISION (Mr William Easterby, 11-5 fav) 1; Nowmelad (4-1 2nd fav) 2; The Long Walk (13-2) 3. H'cap 8 ran. 1l, 2½l. (T Easterby). Tote: £3.20; pl £1.40, £1.70, £2.60. exacta: £13.40. tricast: £48.07. trifecta: £68.20. CSF: £12.37. Non-runners: Ilot De L'isle, Jehol De Thaix.

Placepot: £52.80

(Race 1) 2, 6, 1; (2) 6, 4; (3) 3, 4, 2; (4) 2, 4, 5; (5) 4, 3, 10; (6) 1, 2, 4.

Quadpot: £18.50

SEDGEFIELD: Good to soft

11.45—SCORSESE (Harry Atkins, 15-8 fav) 1; Tom Creen (17-2) 2; Jermyn Raffles (9-2 jt 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 9 ran. 3½l, nk. (N Mulholland). Tote: £2.88; pl £1.10, £1.80, £2.20. exacta: £13.10. tricast: £64.64. trifecta: £45.00. CSF: £18.91.

12.20—DALSTON LAD (Harry Atkins, 4-9 fav) 1; Daly Boy (13-2) 2; Atlantic Lad (11-4 2nd fav) 3. 6 ran. 13l, 21l. (D Skelton). Tote: £1.45; pl £1.20, £2.30. exacta: £4.00. trifecta: £8.00. CSF: £4.52.

12.50—GINTIME (Sean Quinlan, 4-1) 1; Onehundredneighty (150-1) 2; 4 ran. 42l. (N Richards; 5-6 fav Country Park). Tote: £5.00; exacta: £38.80. trifecta: £155.70. CSF: £52.51.

1.25—HUIT REFLETS (T Gillard, 3-1) 1; Dixie Cowboy (5-2 fav) 2; Jaitroplaclasse (11-4 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 7 ran. 5½l, 4¼l. (M Walford). Tote: £4.00; pl £2.00, £2.00. exacta: £15.70. trifecta: £52.00. CSF: £11.59.

2.00—KINGSTON NARCISSUS (R Chapman, 17-2) 1; Summergrounds (4-1) 2; Sign Again (11-4 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 7 ran. 2¾l, 4½l. (R Menzies; 7-4 fav Devon Skies). Tote: £9.50; pl £2.50, £2.00. exacta: £35.70. trifecta: £149.50. CSF: £41.47.

2.35—TOP FLIGHT CENTURY (Jack Power, 9-1) 1; Kaviar Wood (5-2 2nd fav) 2; Livano Bello (15-8 fav) 3. H'cap 8 ran. 2¼l, 2¾l. (D Thompson). Tote: £10.00; pl £2.60, £1.50, £1.20. exacta: £31.30. tricast: £61.21. trifecta: £80.10. CSF: £33.02. Non-runner: Mr Rumbalicious.

3.10—RED WINE SUPERNOVA (R Corcoran, 15-8) 1; Eskylady (13-8 fav) 2; Drakaris (7-4 2nd fav) 3. 4 ran. 3¼l, 1¾l. (D Pipe). Tote: £2.88; exacta: £5.70. trifecta: £5.30. CSF: £5.43. Non-runner: Elderflower Tonic.

Placepot: £103.20

(Race 1) 2, 8, 5; (2) 3, 4; (3) 4; (4) 5, 2; (5) 5, 3; (6) 4, 5, 1;

Quadpot: £43.50

WINCANTON: Good to soft-good in places

12.53—ALFIE'S PRINCESS (R T Dunne, 15-8 fav) 1; Clotilda (3-1 2nd fav) 2; H'cap 6 ran. 3l. (S Thomas). Tote: £2.88; pl £1.60, £1.70. exacta: £7.60. trifecta: £8.10. CSF: £8.36. Non-runner: Popova.

1.28—LAU AND SHAZ (Mr J Newman, 9-1) 1; Charisma Cat (1-6 fav) 2; Pollyanna's Dream (13-2 2nd fav) 3. 5 ran. ¾l, 6½l. (K Woollacott). Tote: £10.50; pl £2.10, £1.10. exacta: £18.10. trifecta: £25.40. CSF: £12.25.

2.03—BROOMFIELDS CAVE (B Harris, 9-1) 1; Muskoka (5-1) 2; Jupiter Allen (9-2) 3. H'cap 7 ran. 2¼l, 3¾l. (N Mulholland; 10-3 fav Pedley Wood). Tote: £10.80; pl £4.20, £2.70. exacta: £59.90. tricast: £231.68. trifecta: £341.50. CSF: £53.59. Non-runner: Wicked Thoughts.

2.38—BEGIN THE LUCK (R David, 9-1) 1; Mutley Crew (5-1) 2; H'cap 6 ran. ns. (Daisy Hitchins; 9-4 fav Rip Wheeler). Tote: £10.10; pl £3.00, £2.20. exacta: £63.00. trifecta: £45.70. CSF: £51.87.

3.13—ABSOLUTELY DOYEN (F Keighley, 15-8 fav) 1; Ike Sport (20-1) 2; El Capitaine (11-4 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 9 ran. 2¾l, 4½l. (P Nicholls). Tote: £2.88; pl £1.30, £4.30, £1.30. exacta: £39.10. tricast: £106.45. trifecta: £140.50. CSF: £38.23.

3.45—QUEENIE ST CLAIR (F Keighley, 12-1) 1; Haas Boy (4-1) 2; Castle Quarter (50-1) 3. H'cap 12 ran. ¾l, 5l. (Nick Scholfield; 3-1 fav Ugo Bingo). Tote: £15.70; pl £4.80, £1.80, £12.20. exacta: £95.00. tricast: £2407.27. trifecta: £2332.00. CSF: £63.73.

Placepot: £450.10

(Race 1) 2, 5; (2) 3, 1; (3) 6, 5; (4) 5, 6; (5) 7, 6, 8; (6) 5, 1, 9.

Quadpot: £177.00

WETHERBY: Soft-good to soft in places

11.52—SCAVENGERS REIGN (A Chadwick, 11-10 fav) 1; Rosie Baloo (4-1 2nd fav) 2; Halftheworldaway (11-2) 3. 14 ran. 4¼l, 2¾l. (James Owen). Tote: £2.10; pl £1.20, £1.50, £2.10. exacta: £7.40. trifecta: £33.90. CSF: £5.71. Non-runners: Jolie Maresca, Rosie Mahler.

12.27—WOLFBURG (Craig Nichol, 14-1) 1; Athair Mor (2-1 fav) 2; Bo Cruz (7-1) 3. H'cap 8 ran. 9½l, 2½l. (A M Thomson). Tote: £15.00; pl £3.80, £1.30, £2.20. exacta: £55.40. tricast: £223.39. trifecta: £232.40. CSF: £45.34.

1.00—BROOKSIDE LA (C J Todd, 10-3 2nd fav) 1; Wise Move (8-1) 2; Fast Work (15-2) 3. H'cap 10 ran. ¾l, 3l. (D Skelton; 3-1 fav Oneinthewell). Tote: £4.34; pl £1.60, £2.80, £2.20. exacta: £33.50. tricast: £190.96. trifecta: £229.60. CSF: £31.34. Non-runner: Tigga Time.

1.35—KONFUSION (C Bewley, 8-11 fav) 1; Marble Sands (4-1 jt 2nd fav) 2; Knappers Hill (4-1 jt 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 4 ran. 7l, 1½l. (J Parkinson & S Smith). Tote: £1.73; exacta: £3.40. trifecta: £6.10. CSF: £4.10. Non-runner: Our Power.

2.10—DAYLATEDOLLARSHORT (L Stones, 7-2 2nd fav) 1; Malicash (9-2) 2; Icare Allen (17-2) 3. H'cap 7 ran. nk, 1¾l. (O Murphy; 11-8 fav Glen Road). Tote: £4.50; pl £2.20, £2.70. exacta: £20.40. trifecta: £76.70. CSF: £20.60.

2.45—GENOIS (B Macey, 5-1) 1; Joecooker (7-2 jt fav) 2; Gentleman Bill (6-1) 3. H'cap 9 ran. 1¾l, 4¼l. (J & A O'Neill; 7-2 jtfav Cerendipity). Tote: £6.00; pl £2.10, £1.60, £2.20. exacta: £26.00. tricast: £105.93. trifecta: £109.10. CSF: £24.04. Non-runner: Big City Roller.

3.20—THE RESDEV TYKE (Craig Nichol, 5-2 fav) 1; Avalon Beach (7-1) 2; Toby Two Scoops (9-2 jt 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 11 ran. 2½l, 1½l. (M & D Easterby). Tote: £3.50; pl £1.50, £2.50, £1.60. exacta: £22.30. tricast: £78.55. trifecta: £137.20. CSF: £20.79.

Placepot: £39.10

(Race 1) 13, 11, 5; (2) 3, 2, 1; (3) 8, 10, 6; (4) 5; (5) 6, 3; (6) 6, 7, 2;

Quadpot: £17.20

WOLVERHAMPTON: Standard

1.12—LEGAL REFORM (E Greatrex, 17-2) 1; Stratusnine (6-5 fav) 2; Tribal Wisdom (18-5 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 6 ran. 1¼l, nk. (M Herrington). Tote: £11.10; pl £4.00, £1.10. exacta: £33.80. trifecta: £115.00. CSF: £19.17.

1.50—SOVEREIGN OCEAN (L Catton, 13-8 fav) 1; Sovereign Wealth (9-4 2nd fav) 2; Grey Horizon (15-2) 3. H'cap 5 ran. 1¾l, 2¾l. (M Botti). Tote: £2.63; pl £1.20, £1.50. exacta: £5.70. trifecta: £20.10. CSF: £5.68.

2.25—GREEN DAME (B Loughnane, 6-4 fav) 1; She's Divine (7-2 jt 2nd fav) 2; Dolos Dream (9-2) 3. 10 ran. 2¾l, 1l. (G Boughey). Tote: £2.70; pl £1.40, £1.30, £1.60. exacta: £8.60. trifecta: £29.90. CSF: £7.01.

3.00—EL BUFALO (C Fallon, 9-2) 1; Westgate Warrior (4-1 2nd fav) 2; Hint Of Humour (9-4 fav) 3. H'cap 8 ran. ½l, shd. (T Faulkner). Tote: £5.50; pl £1.80, £1.80, £1.40. exacta: £13.20. tricast: £50.50. trifecta: £55.30. CSF: £22.91. Non-runners: Lazzar, Peregrine Falcon.

3.35—BRASIL POWER (B Loughnane, 10-3 2nd fav) 1; Paradias (7-2) 2; Haku (5-1) 3. H'cap 6 ran. nk, 2¼l. (G Boughey; 13-8 fav Aeolian). Tote: £4.34; pl £2.10, £1.70. exacta: £19.90. trifecta: £57.70. CSF: £15.72.

4.05—QUEUE DOS (E Greatrex, 13-2) 1; Lady Wingalong (13-2) 2; Maris Angel (5-2 2nd fav) 3. H'cap 8 ran. ½l, 1¾l. (J S Moore; 9-4 fav Bella Bisbee). Tote: £10.50; pl £1.80, £2.20, £1.50. exacta: £52.20. tricast: £135.03. trifecta: £287.50. CSF: £48.35. Non-runner: Powdering.

4.35—PARLANDO (E Greatrex, 9-4 2nd fav) 1; Zryan (7-2) 2; Unassuming (13-8 fav) 3. H'cap 7 ran. 2¼l, 1l. (I Williams). Tote: £3.25; pl £1.90, £2.10. exacta: £12.00. trifecta: £29.50. CSF: £10.52.

5.05—SILKIES SIB (C Fallon, 13-8 fav) 1; Scenario (20-1) 2; Back From Dubai (11-2) 3. H'cap 9 ran. ns, ½l. (James Owen). Tote: £2.63; pl £1.40, £4.20, £1.70. exacta: £43.50. tricast: £153.23. trifecta: £255.00. CSF: £41.10.

5.35—LAW SUPREME (B Loughnane, 13-2) 1; GALAXY WONDER (C Bishop, 11-8 fav) 1; Trusty Scout (25-1) 3. H'cap 9 ran. dht, 3½l. (I Williams, A Carroll). Tote: Law Supreme £3.75, Galaxy Wonder £1.19; pl Law Supreme £2.10, Galaxy Wonder £1.30, Trusty Scout £5.70. exacta: Law Supreme, Galaxy Wonder £12.70, Galaxy Wonder, Law Supreme £7.00. tricast: Galaxy Wonder, Trusty Scout, Law Supreme £109.01, Galaxy Wonder, Law Supreme, Trusty Scout £79.11. trifecta: Law Supreme, Galaxy Wonder, Trusty Scout £145.90, Galaxy Wonder, Law Supreme, Trusty Scout £84.20. CSF: Law Supreme, Galaxy Wonder £7.98, Galaxy Wonder, Law Supreme £5.50.

Placepot: £16.80

(Race 1) 2, 1; (2) 1, 3; (3) 5, 10, 1; (4) 2, 6, 3; (5) 4, 1; (6) 3, 5, 2;

Quadpot: £6.10

HIGHLIGHT Wood (left) with Justin Rose at 2016 Ryder Cup

Wood puts cards on the table in bid to LIV in moment

EXCLUSIVE

BY **NEIL MCLEMAN**

GOLF

RYDER CUP star Chris Wood has revealed he has entered LIV Golf qualifying next month because: "I need golf".

And the former world No.22, who gave up the game because of severe anxiety, insisted he can recapture the form which won him three DP World Tour titles.

Wood admitted he went "through hell" before making his first top 10 finish for six years at the Turkish Airlines Open in May.

The world No.750 just missed out at Q School for the DP World Tour and then won a MENA Tour (Middle East & North Africa) event in Portugal this month – his first victory since the 2016 BMW PGA at Wentworth (right).

Now Wood, 38, has now entered the LIV Golf Promotions event where the top two players from a field of 87 will earn places in the Saudi-backed tour in 2026. The winner also banks $200,000 (£148,000).

Wood, who plays the weekly roll-up at his Long Ashton Golf Club said: "I need golf and I want golf. LIV is an opportunity to play.

"Yes, it is divisive. But I am not going to sit at home and wait for invites. Hopefully they will come. And I feel that if I want to get back into the events I want to, I need to be ready.

"There are so many opportunities in world golf now and I am open minded to all of them.

"I need to have a card in my hand. I need to be competitive. LIV Q School is a really difficult format – there are only two places. But there are also 10 spots on offer for their International Series on the Asian Tour.

"Unless I am on tour or playing somewhere, I will be at Q School next year. Hopefully I will have done things to avoid that. There is a lot of work to do to achieve one of the two LIV cards but it is a different conversation then."

Wood went "six, seven, eight months" without going on a golf course – and lost his card – before his coach James Martin took him back out with just his 6-iron and a putter in 2023.

"Pretty much every other club had trauma attached to it," he said. "And I needed to stay away from that and start my recovery. That was pretty much rock bottom.

"Now I am feeling good. I am probably not far off as good as I have ever been mentally. I am not suffering. The only thing missing is the confidence that comes from playing and results.

"I missed the cut in DP Q School last month and I just wanted to play. I had been dreading going out on a golf course so I knew that was a good sign. I then won the MENA event by six and I was quite proud of that."

Wood, who now works with sports coach Dr Edward Coughlan, added: "I am seeing it as a bit of a second career.

"The motivation is still inside me. But in my difficult times, my anxiety over-rode it all. I am still working at that but I am at a point now where I can cope and put it to bed over shots. Can I get back to where I was? Yes 100 percent."

FEVER PITCH

Legends on both sides tear a strip off the MCG

NIP BACK TO PAVILION Australia's Steve Smith was bowled by Josh Tongue

SOME of the biggest names in Ashes cricket have attacked the state of the MCG pitch after a chaotic opening to the fourth Test in Melbourne.

BY **RORY DOLLARD**

After warnings all week that there was a lot of green on top of the wicket, Ben Stokes had no hesitation in bowling first when he won the toss.

That was a move that prompted a day where both sides were bowled out in just 75 overs combined.

Any hopes of a good contest over five days vanished before tea on day one.

Not since 1909 had two innings previously been completed on the first day of an Ashes Test, with Australia dismissed for 152 and England for an even lower score of 110.

And when the carnage was over, there was no shortage of legends of the game queuing up to have their say. "That first-day wicket is a shocker, it really is," said England's 2005 Ashes-winning captain Michael Vaughan.

Sir Alastair Cook, who ground out a belligerent 244 not out on a flat MCG deck in 2017, was in agreement, added: "We have to talk a little bit about this wicket. It's been too heavily weighted towards the bowlers.

"They didn't have to work that hard for wickets. Could both sides have batted better? Yes. But I was watching some of the bowling on that pitch and I was thinking, 'How do you face that?'

"Mitchell Starc was bowling round the wicket, some were nipping miles that way and some nipping miles the other way. I don't know how you hit it. It's a bit of an unfair contest."

SPEAKING OUT Vaughan (left) and Cook were critical

England bowling great, Stuart Broad, said: "It has just done far too much.

"Test match bowlers don't need this amount of movement to look threatening."

Even Ricky Ponting, the former Australia captain, was questioning the contest.

"We found out there is 10mm of grass that has been left on this particular surface. Last year, which was a Test match that went late into day five, we believe there was only 7mm of grass on that one," he said.

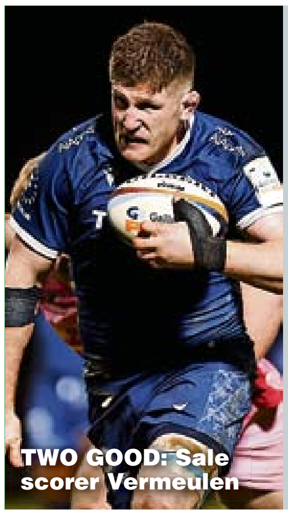
"That will be the question that is going to be asked of the groundsmen – why did you leave more grass this year than previous years?"

Unsurprisingly, the most successful quicks from each side were unwilling to criticise conditions.

Josh Tongue, who took career-best figures of 5-45 for England, said: "It was an amazing day of Test cricket. I thought we did an amazing job as a bowling unit and they've bowled well too.

"It's obviously a pitch that's doing quite a bit.

"If you put the ball in the right areas, which I think we did, you're going to get your rewards."



TWO GOOD: Sale scorer Vermeulen

Sharks show bite in Quins thrashing

RUGBY UNION

Sale 43 Harlequins 17

ALEX SANDERSON could not hide his delight after Sale ended a run of four straight Prem defeats by hammering Harlequins.

Quins led 17-12 at the break through tries from Marcus Smith and Jack Walker but Sharks, who scored through Alex Wills and Luke Cowan-Dickie in the first half, ran riot after the interval. Jacques Vermeulen scored twice to seal the bonus point and Rekeiti Ma'asi-White, Raffi Quirke and Nathan Jibulu also touched down as Sale ran in 31 unanswered second-half points.

Director of rugby Sanderson said: "We were physically brilliant all game. We were down on the scoreboard at half-time but that didn't represent the physical dominance we had in that first half.

"It was a case of, 'More of the same, please' and sometimes the plan just comes together, so I couldn't be prouder of the lads.

"We desperately needed the win but could I have seen that second half coming? Not the scoreline. It blew out but we were good value for the win."

Harlequins have lost six of their eight league games this season and their play-off hopes are already beginning to fade.

Head coach Jason Gilmore said: "When it turns into an arm wrestle, that's what we're not handling at the moment.

"The boys will be licking their wounds a bit."

EYES ON THE PRIZE

Littler thanks parents for having vision to correct his sight as a child

FULLY FOCUSED Littler is on a mission to defend his world title and claim the £1million cheque, helped by an operation when he was a kid

LUKE LITTLER has revealed he had corrective surgery on the deadliest mince pies in darts – and we are not talking the shortcrust version you have been scoffing over Christmas.

BY **MIKE WALTERS**

As an infant Luke the Nuke was treated for strabismus, a condition where the eyes do not align perfectly and their focus points in different directions.

But there was nothing wrong with his 20-20 vision – better known as double top on the oche – when he became the youngest world champion at 17 years old.

And when Littler faces slowcoach Mensur Suljovic (above) in the PDC World Championship at Alexandra Palace tonight, his eyes will be firmly on the prize – back-to-back titles and the jackpot £1million of loot.

The Warrington wizard's vague memory of the operation which changed his life was jogged on a recent goodwill visit to his home-town hospital where the surgery was carried out when he was just starting school.

He appreciates the opthalmic intervention more than ever now, and he said: "I don't even know what's the right word for my condition.

"The slang version is 'bog eye' but what's the actual word for it?

"I don't have memories of it now. But it had to be done. And it got done.

"In a precision sport where millimetres matter, it's pretty important to have accurate eyesight."

When your livelihood depends on hitting targets the size of processed peas, sure-fire aim is an essential tool of the trade. Littler said: "Who knows how my career might have turned out [without that surgery]?

"Mum and dad wanted it sorted but when I was younger, I didn't really care. Now, when you look back, it was a good thing to get done.

"I don't have many memories of that happening. There are pictures that me and my family put on [social media].

"I think that's the last time I was in hospital for anything. I was only four or maybe five. Leading up to the World Championship, I wanted to do some great things.

"I wanted to go there and surprise the little ones and throw a few magnetic darts with them."

Remarkably, for the world's No.1 darts player, Littler does not have an annual eye test – and he cannot even remember having one.

"Maybe I did when I was at the hospital," he said. "But yeah, not through darts.

"Obviously for a normal person, if your vision starts to go blurry or something, that's when you have to go to the doctors."

Littler goes into his first professional meeting with Suljovic having averaged 100-plus in 11 of his 15 matches at the PDC World Championship.

The Austrian was blasted for "cheating" through his painstaking slow play by beaten second-round opponent Joe Cullen, but Littler concedes it is just Suljovic's style.

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

AFTERNOON SESSION (12:30PM)

Wesley Plaisier v Krzysztof Ratajski
Andrew Gilding v Luke Woodhouse (25)
Jonny Clayton (5) v Niels Zonneveld

EVENING SESSION (7PM)

Andreas Harrysson v Ricardo Pietreczko
Stephen Bunting (4) v James Hurrell
Luke Littler (1) v Mensur Suljovic

HURRELL'S GUTSY REBUILD

BRICKLAYER James Hurrell has been getting away with mortar on the building site – but tonight he could be rich beyond his wildest beams.

BY **MIKE WALTERS**

The 'Hillbilly' faces No.4 seed Stephen Bunting for a place in the last 16 at the PDC World Championship, eight years after he almost died from a serious abdominal illness.

Hurrell will bank easily the biggest payday of his darts career – a minimum of £60,000 – if he upsets the odds as he did in the second round against Dirk van Duijvenbode.

The Moreton-in-Marsh fighter was ruled out of competitive darts for more than two years after emergency surgery saved his life in 2017, and Hurrell has already fulfilled a promise made to his dad as he was wheeled into the operating theatre.

The world No.63 said: "I had a twisted bowel and nearly died. I had to pull out of the Lakeside [BDO World Championship].

"I didn't go to the doctors – it's a man thing – and I used to go to tournaments and come back with pain up in my ribs.

"I couldn't go to the toilet for weeks, months. Then all of a sudden you go to the toilet, it goes and you think you're all right after that. But no… I slept on the sofa for six, seven months and it was only when I was sick in the kitchen sink when there was blood, that's when I decided I needed to go to the doctors.

"My dad rubbed my head when I went down in the wheelchair for the operation. I had a goal and I did it.

"I didn't throw darts for two-and-a-half years. I was really ill. I went down to eight stone, seven stone. Not very good at all, but what happened next is giving me all confidence now that I'm getting stuck into this [tournament]."

PAYDAY Hurrell is enjoying his run

WORLD OF SPORT

Smith gives Trinity a glimpse of future

RUGBY LGE

WAKEFIELD lost the Festive Challenge battle 18-10 to Leeds at Headingley but teenager Harvey Smith proved that he may help them win the war one day.

Three of the Rhinos academy products produced the tries that led to this pre-season win even though it was Smith – made captain for the day – who really impressed.

And Trinity head coach Daryl Powell was delighted by his youngster's performance.

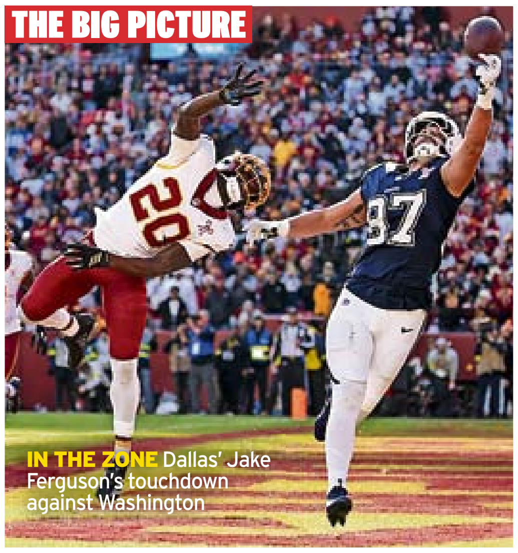
SMITH

"He's had a standout pre-season for us," he said. "Physically he's growing, I made him captain today, I just thought he deserved it with his pre-season and I thought he showed today he's a proper player.

"Physically he's handled it and he's got speed other nines don't have. He's a lot going for him."

Alfie Edgell, George Brown and Riley Lumb scored the tries that sealed Leeds' win.

THE BIG PICTURE



IN THE ZONE Dallas' Jake Ferguson's touchdown against Washington

TENNIS

JACK DRAPER will miss next month's Australian Open after admitting he is not quite ready for a return to top-level competition.

The British No.1 has played just one match since Wimbledon, with bone bruising in his left arm curtailing his 2025 season.

Draper, ranked 10th in the world, said in a video posted on X: "Unfortunately, me and my team have decided not to head out to Australia this year.

"It's a really, really tough decision, obviously [with] Australia being a grand slam, it's one of the biggest tournaments.

"However, I've had this injury for a long time, I'm at the very, very end stages of the process and to step back on court into best-of-five-set tennis so soon just doesn't seem like a smart decision."

10 to tackle

1. Which Belgian won the 2024 and 2025 Ironman 70.3 World Championship men's gold medal?
2. In addition to Salford Red Devils, at which club did half-back Oliver Russell spend 2025 between spells at Huddersfield Giants?
3. Which Italian pair won their singles matches to win the Davis Cup final last month?
4. Which former England cricket captain played for Somerset from 1973-1986?
5. Which two London teams did Martin Jol manage?
6. Which golfer became the first woman to win the same event four years in a row after a play-off at the 1997 Standard Register tournament in Phoenix?
7. Which British middle-distance runner won gold medals in the 1500m at the 1980 and 1984 Olympics?
8. Which famous motor race was won by Emerson Fittipaldi in 1989 and 1993?
9. Which American boxer became undisputed heavyweight champion in 1992, beating Evander Holyfield?
10. What does the Olympic motto Citius, Altius, Fortius mean?

RATINGS
0-3 Oh dear
4-6 Small beer
7-9 So near
10 Sporting Seer

ANSWERS: 1 Jelle Geens. 2 Wakefield Trinity. 3 Matteo Berrettini and Flavio Cobolli. 4 Ian Botham. 5 Tottenham Hotspur and Fulham. 6 Laura Davies. 7 Sebastian Coe. 8 Indianapolis 500. 9 Riddick Bowe. 10 Faster, higher, stronger

FESTIVE Guardiola enjoyed Christmas break

PEP: CITY KNOW THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

Forest v Man City
Today, 12.30pm

MANCHESTER CITY manager Pep Guardiola admits he has probably put on a few pounds over Christmas, but knows his players will have remained "incredibly disciplined".

With the 3-0 win against West Ham leaving them just two points behind Premier League leaders Arsenal, Guardiola had the squad weighed and warned them not to over-indulge at Christmas.

City head to Nottingham Forest for today's lunchtime kick-off, where a win would put them top before the Gunners host Brighton.

"I [weigh] four or five kilos more for the amount of food and drinks that I have drunk, so it is really good," said Guardiola, who "absolutely" let himself switch off.

The City boss, though, fully expects the players to have their focus where it needs to be.

"They have been incredibly disciplined since 10 years ago," Guardiola said.

"Last season for the injuries that we had was a little bit more difficult, but always they behaved unbelievably. We have a standard as a club, like everybody knows exactly what they have to do."

Sean Dyche wants his Forest side to shift their consistency nto automatic mode if they are to be successful in beating the drop.

Things have improved at the City Ground since Dyche took over in October, but the Forest boss is now looking to find consistency.

He said: "Many years ago, at Burnley, we used to talk about the idea of just doing automatic behaviours.

"But it takes time. The culture has been changing and players have done fantastically well with it.

"Now it's about pushing all the time more and more."

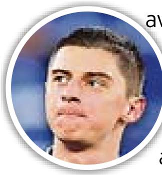
Vitalii contract talks

BY **CHRIS BEESLEY**

Burnley v Everton
Today, 3pm

DAVID MOYES hopes to keep Vitalii Mykolenko at Everton even though the Ukraine defender has only six months left on his contract.

As of January 1 Mykolenko (below) will be able to talk to overseas clubs about a free transfer next summer.



But Moyes insists that negotiations over a new deal for the 26-year-old are progressing.

Ahead of today's trip to Burnley, the Toffees manager said: "We're doing a lot more things behind the scenes. Hopefully we'll get a solution sooner rather than later." Today's game is the first of three in quick succession at Turf Moor which Scott Parker hopes can boost Burnley's chances of avoiding relegation.

The Clarets are seven points adrift of safety, with Newcastle and Manchester United visiting after Everton.

Head coach Parker said: "These games coming up at home are going to be vital for us.

"We're going to need our home supporters and the festive season always brings a different energy."

CHELSEA v ASTON VILLA
Premier League: KO 5.30pm, Sky Sports

Enzo wants Blues to go on winning run like Villa's

BY **SAM TRUELOVE**

ENZO MARESCA has called on his Chelsea side to be more consistent if they are to challenge for top honours.

They face an in-form Aston Villa side today, with Unai Emery's team winning 11 of their last 12 Premier League games.

The Villans are just one point behind second-placed Manchester City, while Arsenal are only three points ahead, and Maresca believes the Blues now need to emulate Villa's form to show progress.

"It's one of the next steps," the Italian said. "To win 10 games in a row is very difficult.

"I think it's normal that they received praise from last year, because they are doing fantastic."

Chelsea have lost only once in their last eight league games, although draws to Bournemouth and Newcastle in that period mean Maresca's side are fighting more for Champions League qualification than the Premier League title.

The former Leicester boss knows how tough a test Villa will present at Stamford Bridge, with the 45-year-old praising Emery ahead of the clash.

"He has done a fantastic job in all the clubs, it can happen that in some clubs you have some problems, but the way he does with his team, it's very clear," Maresca said of the Spaniard.

"They are intense, aggressive. They know exactly what they want when they are on the ball. And again, at Sevilla, PSG, Arsenal, Aston Villa, before, because I faced Emery when I was a player and he was Almeria's manager.

"So it's many years, more than 25 years ago. So Unai is doing a fantastic job everywhere and he deserves it, his work ethic is big."

Maresca has, meanwhile, refused to rule out a January exit for goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen. The 23-year-old has only made five appearances this season, three of those in the Carabao Cup.

Robert Sanchez is the undisputed No.1 in West London and it is understood Jorgensen is desperate for some more regular game time this season, with the Danish keeper open to exploring his options in the window next month.

"I'm not thinking about January, but we are happy with Filip," said Maresca.

"But at the same time, I said many times that they all want to play, and if they don't play, they are not happy.

"So we will see what happens in January."

BADLY DRAWN PLOY

Maresca's side are currently fighting more for Champions League qualification than the league title

To the Victor go the spoils

BY **JAMES PALLATT**

ASTON VILLA are 100 per cent ready for their huge Premier League clash with Chelsea, says Victor Lindelof.

The stakes will be high at Stamford Bridge as third meets fourth, with Villa's incentive clear - victory would put them 10 points ahead of Chelsea in the battle for a top-four finish and talk of Unai Emery's men challenging Arsenal and Manchester City for the title will only grow louder.

Lindelof (right) knows a thing or two about playing in big matches, having spent eight years at Manchester United before moving to Villa Park last summer, and the significance of today's game is not lost on the Swedish defender.

"Everyone is ready for the task. It's going to be tricky, but we take one game at a time, start with that, hopefully get three points, and then we can focus on the next challenge," he said.

Lindelof helped his new teammates overcome his old ones last weekend as a double from Morgan Rogers inspired Villa to a 2-1 win over United.

He added: "We've been performing great and winning a lot of games, which is super important for us."

GUNNERS ARE SET FAIR

No dismissals with Arsenal on best behaviour

TITLE ON THE CARDS Mikel Arteta has tightened up Arsenal's disciplinary issues

BY **NEIL McLEMAN**

MIKEL ARTETA claimed he was unaware that Arsenal topped the Fair Play League as well as the Premier League this Christmas.

But a better disciplinary record this season – and avoiding a single red card – will play a huge role in his side's bid to win a first title since 2004.

Declan Rice was sent off after picking up a second yellow card for nudging the ball away to stop a quick free-kick when Arsenal hosted Brighton last season.

The England midfielder was one of five Arsenal stars to take early baths in the previous campaign, along with Leandro Trossard, Myles Lewis-Skelly, Mikel Merino and William Saliba.

Belgium star Trossard also received a second caution against Chelsea, also for kicking the ball away, as Arteta had to answer criticism of practising "dark arts".

This season the Gunners are better – or smarter and more street-wise. Their combustible manager does not always keep his cool on the sidelines but his players are more in control.

They have lost only twice in all competitions to top the Champions League table as well.

And although they have had 22 bookings – including six in the stormy draw against 10-man Chelsea last month – the Spaniard's side have yet to have a man sent off this season. "I didn't know," said Arteta. "That is good, very good." After the dismissal of Rice against Brighton last season, the Gunners boss claimed he was "amazed, amazed, amazed" while even referee Chris Kavanagh could be heard on the audio saying: "I don't like it, but he's knocked the ball."

Former Wolves boss Vitor Pereira was sent off for kicking the ball away in frustration against Brighton in October but the Premier League has denied the threshold has been reduced.

Arteta said: "I think the rules are different now. So, we paid a big price with that rule, and hopefully that stays away and we continue to play with 11.

"I remember [Rice's dismissal] very well. I was hacked off in the manner that we played with 10 men. So hopefully it is going to be different this time."

Arsenal dropped points last season against their next five opponents – Brighton, Aston Villa, Bournemouth, Liverpool and Chelsea. And Brighton have won three times at the Emirates since April 2022.

"Brighton is a club that I admire a lot – and what they've done over the last 10 years is incredible," added Arteta.

"They have had different managers, and now Fabian [Hurzeler] has come in and brought some very different ideas as well."

The Gunners have been boosted by the news striker Kai Havertz is close to a comeback.

The Germany forward has been out since August with a knee injury which needed surgery, but Arteta said: "[He is] quite close. I think it will be a matter of days, not weeks."

ARSENAL v BRIGHTON
Premier League: KO 3pm

RICE IN A PADDY Midfield star Declan Rice was sent off against Brighton last season

KICKING THE HABIT

Premier League fair play table

	Yellow	Yell/Red	Red	Yell/straight red	Total points
1 Arsenal	22	0	0	0	22
2 Manchester City	27	0	0	0	27
3 Leeds	27	0	0	0	27
4 Manchester United	25	1	0	1	28
5 Aston Villa	24	0	1	1	29
6 Newcastle	22	1	1	2	30
7 Nottingham Forest	30	0	0	0	30
8 Crystal Palace	30	0	0	0	30
9 Burnley	23	1	1	2	31
10 Liverpool	33	0	0	0	33
11 West Ham	25	1	1	2	33
12 Fulham	33	0	0	0	33
13 Brentford	34	0	0	0	34
14 Everton	34	0	1	1	39
15 Brighton	41	0	0	0	41
16 Sunderland	35	0	2	2	45
17 Bournemouth	42	0	1	1	47
18 Wolves	37	0	2	2	47
19 Tottenham	42	1	1	2	50
20 Chelsea	34	1	3	4	52

A Fab time to end slump for Seagulls

FABIAN HURZELER says Brighton are capable of shocking leaders Arsenal, despite being in their worst form of the season.

The Seagulls head to the Emirates winless in four games, but asked whether Brighton should alter their approach, boss Hurzeler (right) said: "Why should we change?

"We know what the issue is, we have to overcome the consistency thing and play well for 90 minutes. We have shown we are capable of doing big things, and the most important is to do the small margins right.

"Stay alive for the 90 minutes, but we can't go there with the mindset only to defend. We have to play with courage and bring our style of play to the pitch.

"We know that we can beat every team in the league, we go there to win."

SPORT IN BRIEF

Premier League

MAN UTD (1) 1	**NEWCASTLE (0) 0**
Dorgu 24	

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	17	12	3	2	31	10	39
Man City	17	12	1	4	41	16	37
Aston Villa	17	11	3	3	27	18	36
Chelsea	17	8	5	4	29	17	29
Man Utd	18	8	5	5	32	28	29
Liverpool	17	9	2	6	28	25	29
Sunderland	17	7	6	4	19	17	27
Crystal Palace	17	7	5	5	21	19	26
Brighton	17	6	6	5	25	23	24
Everton	17	7	3	7	18	20	24
Newcastle	18	6	5	7	23	23	23
Brentford	17	7	2	8	24	25	23
Fulham	17	7	2	8	24	26	23
Tottenham	17	6	4	7	26	23	22
Bournemouth	17	5	7	5	26	29	22
Leeds	17	5	4	8	24	31	19
Nottm Forest	17	5	3	9	17	26	18
West Ham	17	3	4	10	19	35	13
Burnley	17	3	2	12	19	34	11
Wolves	17	0	2	15	9	37	2

Sky Bet Championship

BIRMINGHAM (0) 1	**DERBY (1) 1**
Robinson 64	Agyemang 27 **Att: 28,082**
COVENTRY (1) 1	**SWANSEA (0) 0**
Mason-Clark 44	**Att: 30,139**
LEICESTER (1) 1	**WATFORD (1) 2**
James 7	Maamma 45 Pollock 65
MIDDLESBRO (0) 0	**BLACKBURN (0) 0**
	Att: 31,475
MILLWALL (0) 0	**IPSWICH (0) 0**
	Att: 18,843
NORWICH (0) 1	**CHARLTON (0) 0**
Makama 61	**Att: 26,594**
OXFORD UTD (1) 2	**SOUTHMPTN (1) 1**
Goodrham 23 Mills 89	Harwood-Bellis 29 **Att: 11,500**
PORTSMOUTH (1) 1	**QPR (0) 1**
Devlin 45	Dunne 61 **Att: 20,449**
SHEFF WED (1) 2	**HULL (1) 2**
Ingelsson 21 Cadamarteri 60	Belloumi 37 Crooks 65 **Att: 27,929**
STOKE (0) 0	**PRESTON (0) 0**
	Att: 26,314
WEST BROM (0) 1	**BRISTOL C (2) 2**
Diakite 85 **Att: 25,050**	Mehmeti 4 McCrorie 22
WREXHAM (2) 5	**SHEFF UTD (3) 3**
Bindon 9 (og) Moore 28, 76 Longman 52 Windass 81 (pen)	Bamford 7, 15 O'Hare 24

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Coventry	23	15	6	2	54	23	51
Middlesbro	23	12	7	4	33	24	43
Ipswich	23	10	8	5	38	23	38
Hull	23	11	5	7	39	37	38
Preston	23	9	10	4	30	23	37
Bristol City	23	10	6	7	32	25	36
Millwall	23	10	6	7	25	31	36
Watford	23	9	8	6	33	29	35
QPR	23	10	5	8	33	35	35
Stoke	23	10	4	9	28	21	34
Derby	23	8	8	7	32	31	32
Southampton	23	8	7	8	37	33	31
Wrexham	23	7	10	6	32	30	31
Leicester	23	8	7	8	32	33	31
Birmingham	23	8	6	9	31	30	30
West Brom	23	8	4	11	26	31	28
Charlton	22	7	6	9	21	27	27
Blackburn	22	7	5	10	22	26	26
Sheff Utd	23	8	2	13	31	36	26
Swansea	23	7	5	11	24	31	26
Oxford Utd	23	5	7	11	24	32	22
Portsmouth	22	5	7	10	19	29	22
Norwich	23	5	6	12	26	35	21
Sheff Wed	22	1	7	14	18	45	-8

Sky Bet League One

AFC WIMB'DN (0) 0	**STEVENAGE (0) 0**
BARNSLEY (2) 2	**MANSFIELD (1) 3**
BLACKPOOL (1) 1	**DONCASTER (0) 0**
BOLTON (1) 2	**ROTHERHAM (0) 1**
BRADFORD (1) 2	**WIGAN (0) 1**
BURTON ALB (4) 5	**NORTHAMPTN (1) 1**
CARDIFF (0) 1	**EXETER (0) 0**
HUDDRSFLD (3) 5	**PORT VALE (0) 0**
LUTON (2) 4	**WYCOMBE (0) 0**
PETERBORO (0) 1	**L ORIENT (0) 0**
PLYMOUTH (0) 1	**READING (3) 4**
STOCKPORT (0) 1	**LINCOLN C (1) 2**

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cardiff	21	14	2	5	38	22	44
Lincoln City	22	12	5	5	32	23	41
Bradford	21	11	7	3	31	21	40
Bolton	21	10	7	4	30	20	37
Stevenage	20	10	6	4	24	15	36
Stockport Cty	21	10	5	6	29	27	35
Huddersfield	22	10	4	8	40	31	34
Luton	22	9	5	8	30	28	32
Barnsley	19	8	4	7	32	30	28
Wycombe	22	7	7	8	28	26	28
Reading	21	7	7	7	28	27	28
Leyton Orient	22	8	4	10	34	35	28
Peterborough	21	9	1	11	25	27	28
AFC Wimbledn	21	8	4	9	24	29	28
Burton Albion	21	7	6	8	23	27	27
Northampton	21	8	3	10	22	26	27
Mansfield	21	7	5	9	27	28	26
Wigan	21	6	8	7	23	25	26
Blackpool	22	7	5	10	25	30	26
Plymouth	22	8	1	13	27	37	25
Rotherham	22	6	6	10	22	29	24
Exeter	21	7	2	12	21	21	23
Doncaster	22	6	4	12	21	36	22
Port Vale	21	3	6	12	13	29	15

Sky Bet League Two

ACCRINGTON (1) 2	**BARROW (1) 1**
BRISTOL R (2) 2	**BROMLEY (0) 3**
CHELTENHAM (2) 3	**SHRWSBURY (0) 1**
CHESTERFLD (0) 2	**NOTTS CO (0) 0**
CRAWLEY TN (1) 1	**COLCHESTER (1) 1**
GILLINGHAM (0) 1	**CAMBRIDGE (1) 1**
GRIMSBY (0) 0	**OLDHAM (0) 0**
MK DONS (1) 1	**SWINDON (0) 0**
NEWPORT (0) 0	**BARNET (0) 0**
SALFORD CITY (0) 1	**HARROGATE (0) 0**
TRANMERE (1) 1	**FLEETWOOD (0) 0**
WALSALL (1) 1	**CREWE (0) 0**

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Walsall	22	13	4	5	31	19	43
Bromley	22	12	6	4	37	25	42
Swindon	22	12	4	6	35	26	40
MK Dons	22	11	6	5	43	24	39
Salford City	22	12	3	7	33	30	39
Notts County	22	11	5	6	35	24	38
Chesterfield	22	10	8	4	39	31	38
Cambridge	22	9	8	5	25	19	35
Fleetwood	22	9	6	7	32	29	33
Colchester	22	8	8	6	36	27	32
Crewe	22	9	5	8	34	29	32
Gillingham	22	7	10	5	30	25	31
Barnet	22	7	8	7	28	25	29
Tranmere	22	7	8	7	36	34	29
Oldham	22	6	10	6	21	17	28
Grimsby	22	7	7	8	33	30	28
Accrington	22	7	6	9	25	26	27
Cheltenham	22	8	3	11	21	35	27
Barrow	22	5	6	11	22	32	21
Crawley Town	22	4	7	11	26	37	19
Shrewsbury	22	4	7	11	21	37	19
Bristol Rovers	22	5	3	14	18	42	18
Harrogate Tn	22	4	5	13	18	36	17
Newport Cty	22	3	5	14	21	41	14

Enterprise National Lge

BRACKLEY (1) 1	**FOREST GRN (0) 0**
BRAINTREE (0) 0	**SOUTHEND (0) 1**
EASTLEIGH (0) 1	**WOKING (0) 1**
FC HALIFAX (0) 2	**ALTRINCHAM (0) 1**
GATESHEAD (0) 0	**CARLISLE (1) 3**
HARTLEPOOL (0) 1	**SCUNTHORPE (0) 2**
MORECAMBE (0) 1	**ROCHDALE (1) 2**
SOLIHULL M (4) 7	**TAMWORTH (1) 1**
SUTTON UTD (0) 0	**ALDERSHOT (0) 0**
TRURO CITY (1) 1	**YEOVIL (0) 0**
WEALDSTONE (0) 0	**BOREHAM W (2) 4**
YORK (1) 2	**BOSTON UTD (0) 2**

Africa Cup Of Nations
Group A

MOROCCO (1) 1	**MALI (0) 1**
ZAMBIA (0) 0	**COMOROS (0) 0**

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Mali	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Zambia	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Comoros	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

Group B

ANGOLA (1) 1	**ZIMBABWE (1) 1**
EGYPT (1) 1	**SOUTH AFRICA (0) 0**
Salah 45 (pen)	

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
South Africa	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Angola	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Zimbabwe	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

RUGBY UNION
Gallagher Prem

SALE 43	**HARLEQUINS 17**

Sale—T: Wills, Cowan-Dickie, Vermeulen (2), Ma'asi-White, Quirke, Jibulu. **C**: Ford (2), R. Du Preez (2).
Harlequins—T: Smith, Walker. **C**: Smith (2). **P**: Smith.

	P	W	D	L	B	F	A	Pts
Bath	7	6	0	1	7	259	144	31
Exeter	7	5	1	1	6	219	128	28
North'pton	7	5	1	1	6	240	211	28
Leicester	7	5	0	2	6	221	179	26
Bristol	7	5	0	2	4	227	188	24
Saracens	7	3	0	4	9	252	177	21
Sale	8	3	0	5	6	239	235	18
Harlequins	8	2	0	6	2	168	251	10
Gloucester	7	1	0	6	4	148	250	8
Newcastle	7	0	0	7	0	101	311	0

TODAY'S DIARY

(3pm unless stated)

Premier League

Arsenal v Brighton
Brentford v AFC Bournemouth
Burnley v Everton
Chelsea v Aston Villa (5.30)
(Live on Sky Sports Main Event)
Liverpool v Wolverhampton
Nottingham Forest v Man City (12.30)
West Ham v Fulham

William Hill Premiership

Aberdeen v Dundee Utd (5.45)
(Live on Premier Sports)
Dundee v Falkirk
Hibernian v Hearts (12.30)
(Live on Sky Sports Football)
Livingston v Celtic
(Live on Sky Sports Football)
Rangers v Motherwell
St Mirren v Kilmarnock

William Hill—Championship: Arbroath v Airdrieonians, Morton v Ayr, Queen's Park v Partick, Raith v Dunfermline, Ross County v St Johnstone. **League One:** Alloa v Stenhousemuir, East Fife v Kelty Hearts, Montrose v Inverness CT, Peterhead v Cove Rangers, Queen of the South v Hamilton. **League Two:** Annan Athletic v Stranraer, Dumbarton v Stirling, East Kilbride v Clyde, Edinburgh City v Spartans, Forfar v Elgin.

RUGBY UNION

Gallagher Prem (3.05): Bath v Northampton (5.30), Bristol v Newcastle, Gloucester v Saracens.

TOMORROW'S DIARY

Premier League

Crystal Palace v Tottenham (4.30)
(Live on Sky Sports Main Event)
Sunderland v Leeds (2pm)
(Live on Sky Sports Main Event)

African Cup of Nations
Group E

Algeria v Burkina Faso (5.30)
Equatorial Guinea v Sudan

Group F

Gabon v Mozambique (12.30)
Ivory Coast v Cameroon (8pm)

RUGBY UNION

Gallagher Prem: Exeter v Leicester.

CLAUS FOR

BRUNO G.
39
sela

Resilient United up to fifth as Ruben switches tactics and Dorgu scores winner

PAT ON THE BACK
Dorgu fires home after 24 minutes to put United in front against Newcastle

PREMIER LEAGUE

MAN UNITED		NEWCASTLE
33%	POSSESSION	67%
3	SHOTS ON TARGET	3
6	SHOTS OFF TARGET	6
326	TOTAL PASSES	621
2	CORNERS	11
0	OFFSIDE	1
9	FOULS	5
0 2	CARDS	1 0

REF: Stuart Attwell

LINE-UPS

MAN UNITED: Lammens; Dalot, Heaven, Martinez (Fredricson 88), Shaw (Malacia 88); Ugarte, Casemiro (Yoro 61); Dorgu, Mount (Fletcher 46), Cunha; Sesko (Zirkzee 60)

NEWCASTLE: Ramsdale; Miley, Thiaw, Schar, Hall; Bruno Guimaraes, Tonali (Willock 77), Ramsey (Joelinton 68); J Murphy (Barnes 68), Woltemade (Wissa 68), Gordon

MAN OF THE MATCH
PATRICK DORGU

MAN UNITED 1
Dorgu 24
NEWCASTLE 0

BY **TYRONE MARSHALL**

A FEW months ago, Ruben Amorim said even the Pope couldn't convince him to change his system at Manchester United.

But on the second day of Christmas, he gave in to popular demand.

If a back three is United's past, then could this back four be their future?

Amorim had been teasing the idea of a change of shape in recent weeks and had worked on it in training, so the ghosts of Christmas hadn't visited him in his sleep and brought about an epiphany.

But however it came about, Old Trafford delighted in the reversion to a flat back-four and the end of wing-backs.

There is enough material from the past 13 months to give Amorim nightmares, but this change in formation delivered a change in fortunes as well.

After six weeks of blowing chance after chance to go fifth in the Premier League, they finally took it.

It might last for less than 24 hours, but it shows that this side is in the hunt for a Champions League spot, even if they spent almost the entire second half on the back foot.

When the teamsheets dropped at Old Trafford, it didn't look like it was the night when Amorim changed his ways, but Patrick Dorgu was right-wing rather than left-wing back.

That change caught Newcastle by surprise.

On the touchline, Eddie Howe (below) and Jason Tindall debated a solution, while the Newcastle analysts sat in the press box tried to work out what was happening.

The shrugging of shoulders showed they hadn't been expecting this.

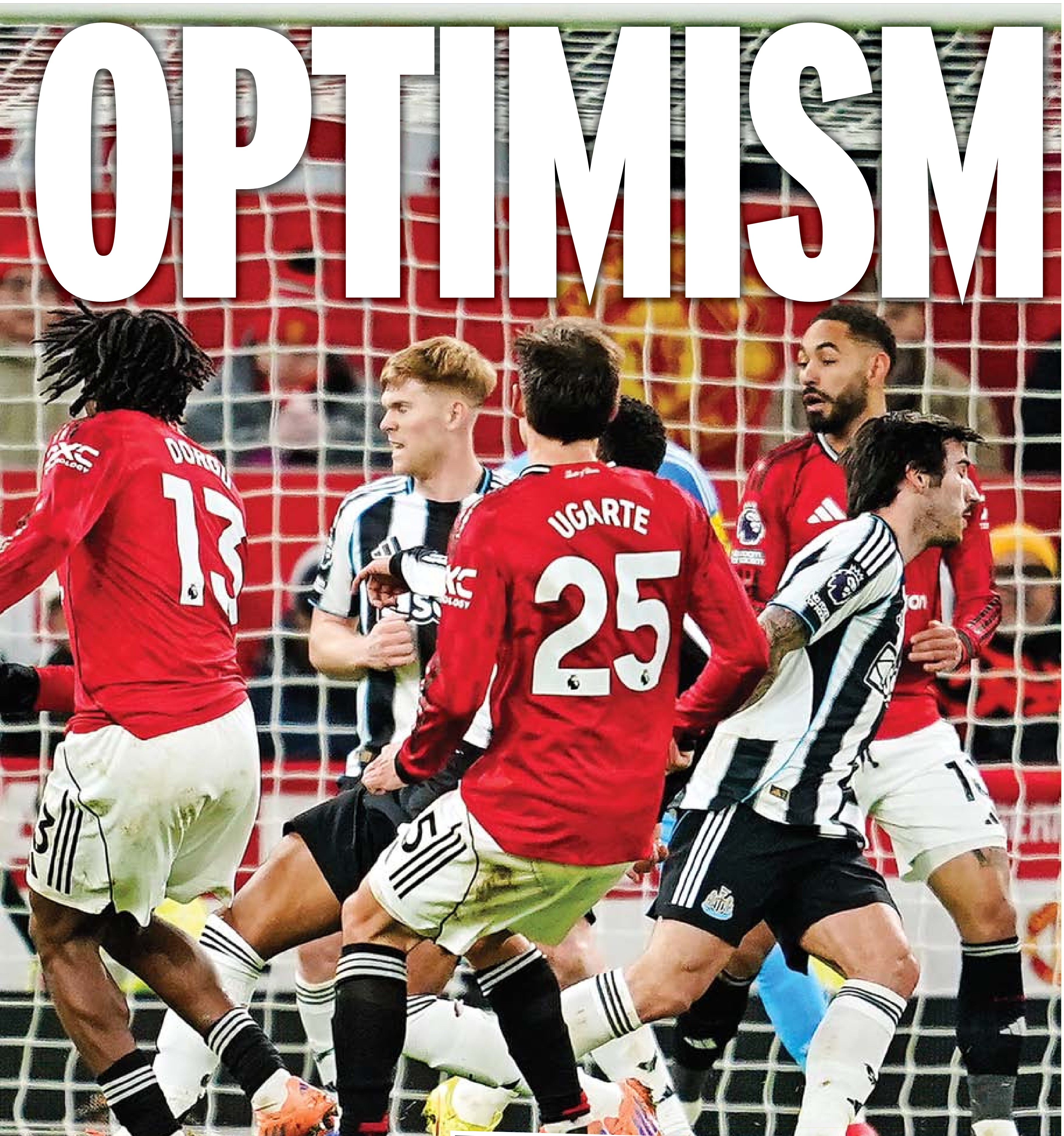
A few weeks ago, Amorim had talked of the anxiety he could feel whenever Dorgu was on the ball, so when he watched his left-wing-back-cum-right-winger settle over a dropping ball 16 yards from goal, he probably didn't expect to see a sweetly-struck volley whizz past Aaron Ramsdale and into the corner of the net.

Dorgu visibly grew in confidence after that. He forced Ramsdale into a smart save soon after and contributed defensively with one thunderous tackle on Lewis Hall that earned a chest bump from Casemiro, but the loss of Mason Mount to injury at half-time turned this into a rearguard effort.

Fabian Schar saw a shot deflected just wide from a corner and was furious when Newcastle were denied a penalty when his shot was blocked by the arms of Lisandro Martinez.

Lewis Hall hit the bar from distance and Anthony Gordon dragged a shot narrowly wide.

OPTIMISM



United's attacks were few and far between.

Benjamin Sesko clipped the top of the bar with a left-footed shot in his last action before being replaced by Joshua Zirkzee, part of a double change that saw Leny Yoro come on, giving the hosts the chance to drop into a back six when required.

And it was needed regularly as Newcastle piled on the pressure. Diogo Dalot and Dorgu were wingers dropping in at full-back as Yoro and Luke Shaw went narrow.

Senne Lammens saved from Joelinton and plucked a cross-shot from Joe Willock out of the air. Gordon should have done better than swiping a shot over after good work by Harvey Barnes, Schar looped a header onto the roof of the net and then Lewis Miley fired wide from 12 yards.

It summed up Newcastle's wastefulness in the final third as wave after wave of attack came to nothing.

It wasn't convincing from Amorim's side, especially after the break.

But after four successive defeats without Bruno Fernandes in the Premier League, victory was all that mattered as Christmas came late to Old Trafford.

AT FULL STRETCH Keeper Lammens clears the danger for United

1-2-X GUIDE

(3 unless stated)

TODAY

PREMIER LEAGUE

(1) Arsenal v Brighton
(2) Brentford v AFC Bournemouth
(3) Burnley v Everton
(4) Chelsea v Aston Villa (5.30)
(6) Liverpool v Wolverhampton
Nott'm Forest v Man City (12.30)
(8) West Ham v Fulham

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

(45) Aberdeen v Dundee Utd (5.45)
(46) Dundee v Falkirk
Hibernian v Hearts (12.30)
(47) Livingston v Celtic
(48) Rangers v Motherwell
(49) St Mirren v Kilmarnock

SCOTTISH CHAMPIONSHIP

Arbroath v Airdrieonians
Morton v Ayr
Queen's Park v Partick
Raith v Dunfermline
Ross County v St Johnstone

SCOTTISH LEAGUE ONE

Alloa v Stenhousemuir
East Fife v Kelty Hearts
Montrose v Inverness CT
Peterhead v Cove Rangers
Queen of South v Hamilton

SCOTTISH LEAGUE TWO

Annan Athletic v Stranraer
Dumbarton v Stirling
East Kilbride v Clyde
Edinburgh City v Spartans
Forfar v Elgin

Northern Premier: Cleethorpes Tn v Workington, Hednesford v FC United.
Southern Premier South: Bracknell Tn v Farnham Tn, Chertsey Tn v Walton & H, Dorchester v Weymouth, Evesham Utd v Yate, Hanwell Tn v Uxbridge, Hungerford v Berkhamsted , Plymouth Parkway v Tiverton, Sholing v Basingstoke Tn, Taunton v Gloucester, Wimborne v Poole. **Premier Central:** AFC Sudbury v Bury Tn, Barwell v Quorn, Bromsgrove v Redditch Utd, Harborough Tn v Kettering, Leiston v Needham Market, Real Bedford v St Ives, Royston v Bishop's S, Spalding Utd v Stamford, Stourbridge v Banbury, Stratford v Alvechurch.
Isthmian Premier: Burgess Hill Tn v Chichester City, Canvey Island v Billericay, Carshalton v Dulwich, Chatham Tn v Dartford, Cray v Cray Valley (PM), Hashtag United v Aveley, Potters Bar v Cheshunt, Ramsgate v Folkestone, St Albans v Wingate & F, Welling v Brentwood Tn, Whitehawk v Lewes.
Lowland Football League: Bo'ness Utd v Linlithgow Rose, Clydebank v Gretna 2008, Cowdenbeath v Albion, East Stirling v Broxburn Athletic, Gala Fairydean v Berwick, Stirling University v Celtic B.
Breedon Highland League: Brechin v Banks ODee, Brora v Wick Academy, Formartine United v Turriff United, Forres Mechanics v Inverurie Loco Works, Huntly v Nairn County, Lossiemouth v Clachnacuddin, Rothes v Fraserburgh, Strathspey Thistle v Buckie Thistle.
Welsh Premier: Caernarfon Tn v Colwyn Bay.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Lecce v Como (2)
Parma v Fiorentina (11.30)
Pisa v Juventus (7.45)
Torino v Cagliari (2)
Udinese v Lazio (5)

TOMORROW

PREMIER LEAGUE

(5) Crystal Palace v Tottenham (4.30)
(7) Sunderland v Leeds (2)

ITALIAN LEAGUE

AC Milan v Verona (11.30)
Atalanta v Inter Milan (7.45)
Bologna v Sassuolo (5)
Cremonese v Napoli (2)

MONDAY

SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP

(9) Birmingham v Southampton (8.15)
(10) Coventry v Ipswich (6)
(11) Leicester v Derby
(12) Middlesbrough v Hull
(13) Millwall v Bristol City
(14) Norwich v Watford
(15) Oxford Utd v Swansea
(16) Portsmouth v Charlton
(17) Sheff Wed v Blackburn
(18) Stoke v Sheff Utd
(19) West Brom v QPR
(20) Wrexham v Preston

SKY BET LEAGUE ONE

(21) AFC Wimbledon v Exeter
(22) Barnsley v Lincoln City
(23) Blackpool v Rotherham
(24) Bolton v Mansfield
(25) Bradford v Port Vale
(26) Burton v Wigan
(27) Cardiff v Stevenage
(28) Huddersfield v Northampton
(29) Luton v Leyton Orient
(30) Peterborough v Reading
(31) Plymouth v Wycombe
(32) Stockport v Doncaster

SKY BET LEAGUE TWO

(33) Accrington Stanley v Harrogate
(34) Bristol Rovers v Barnet
(35) Cheltenham v Swindon
(36) Chesterfield v Cambridge Utd
(37) Crawley Tn v Bromley
(38) Gillingham v Colchester
(39) Grimsby v Shrewsbury
(40) MK Dons v Notts County
(41) Newport County v Crewe (7.30)
(42) Salford City v Fleetwood Tn
(43) Tranmere v Barrow
(44) Walsall v Oldham

Enterprise South: Chelmsford v Dag & Red.

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Roma v Genoa

DAILY EXPRESS
SPORT
express.co.uk/sport

‘JUST LIKE A CHAMPIONS LEAGUE WIN’

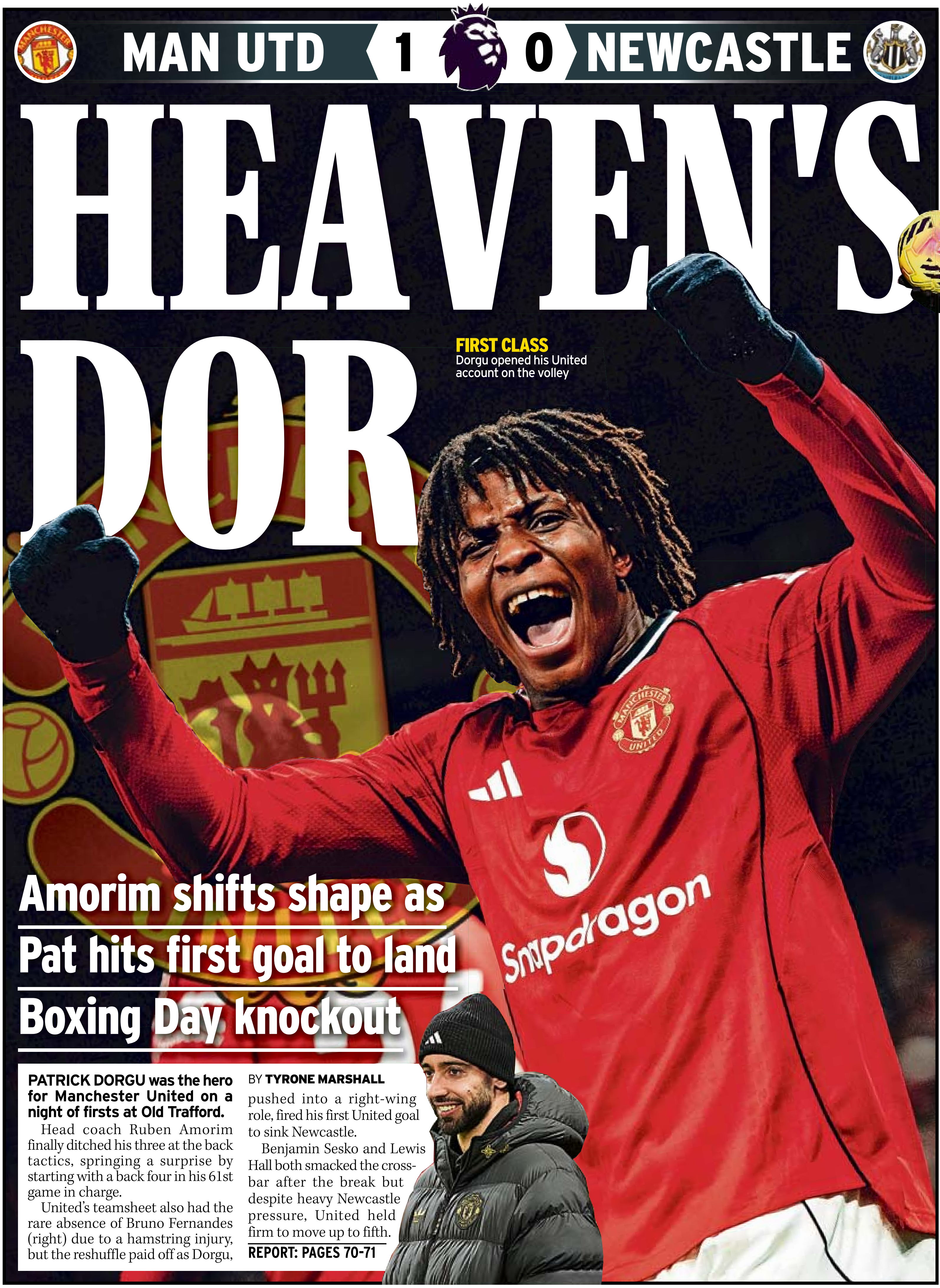
REDKNAPP IN DREAMLAND AFTER KING GEORGE TRIUMPH: PAGE 64

FRANK’S SKY BLUES SOAR EIGHT CLEAR

ALL THE CHAMPIONSHIP ACTION AND REACTION: PULLOUT P6-7

MAN UTD 1 0 NEWCASTLE

HEAVEN'S DOR



FIRST CLASS Dorgu opened his United account on the volley

Amorim shifts shape as Pat hits first goal to land Boxing Day knockout

BY **TYRONE MARSHALL**

PATRICK DORGU was the hero for Manchester United on a night of firsts at Old Trafford.

Head coach Ruben Amorim finally ditched his three at the back tactics, springing a surprise by starting with a back four in his 61st game in charge.

United’s teamsheet also had the rare absence of Bruno Fernandes (right) due to a hamstring injury, but the reshuffle paid off as Dorgu, pushed into a right-wing role, fired his first United goal to sink Newcastle.

Benjamin Sesko and Lewis Hall both smacked the crossbar after the break but despite heavy Newcastle pressure, United held firm to move up to fifth.

REPORT: PAGES 70-71

MIKEL’S ANGELS

How Gunners climbed out of the red zone

FULL STORY: PAGE 69

DAILY EXPRESS
Fever Pitch
YOUR FOOTBALL WEEKEND STARTS HERE
Today

FREE INSIDE

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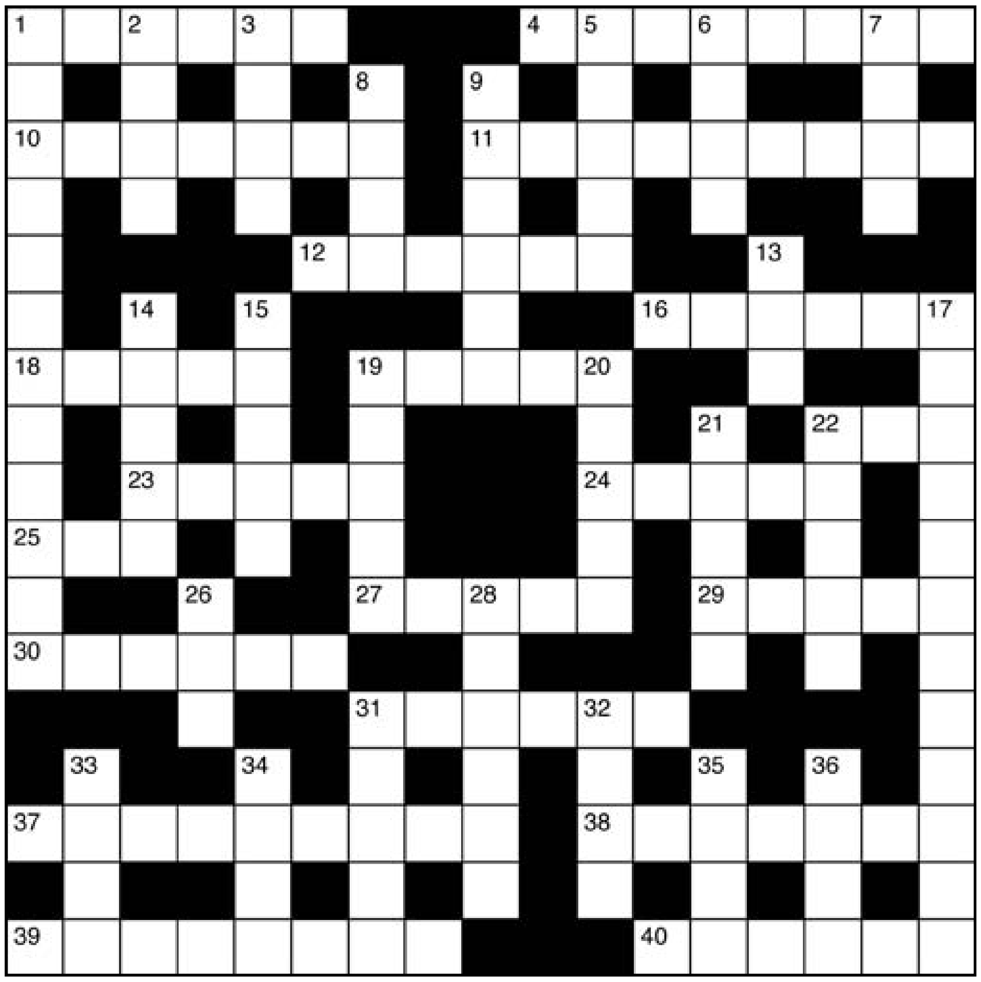
DAILY EXPRESS
Puzzles EXTRA

Welcome to your brilliant Saturday Express eight-page puzzles pullout. We've got plenty here to keep you busy, from your favourite crosswords to brain-teasing sudokus and more. Enjoy!

ENTERTAINMENT CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 James Corden's co-star, _ Horne (6)
4 British actress who starred in The Great Gatsby, Carey _ (8)
10 South African model, _ Swanepoel (7)
11 Lord Coe's first name (9)
12 Celebrity blogger, Perez _ (6)
16 Geordie member of Girls Aloud (6)
18 Dancer and choreographer, _ Spence (5)
19 Nicki _, Trinidadian rapper and singer (5)
22 Irish DJ, Annie _ (3)
23 Home and Away actress, _ Symons (5)
24 Comedian Punt or Coogan (5)
25 Adventurer and TV personality, _ Fogle (3)
27 _ van Persie, Dutch former Manchester Utd striker (5)
29 Fiery chef, _ Pierre White (5)
30 Irish presenter, _ Holmes (6)
31 _ Butler, played The Bounty Hunter (6)
37 His movie roles included Batman and Jim Morrison (3,6)
38 Michael _, appeared in Wall Street and Basic Instinct (7)
39 Helen _, glamour model and former Corrie actress (8)
40 Member of The Corrs who plays the violin (6)

DOWN

1 Canadian vocalist whose most recent album was Higher (7,5)
2 First King of the Celebrity Jungle, _ Blackburn (4)
3 Lebanese fashion designer, _ Saab (4)
5 Keith _, married Nicole Kidman in 2006 (5)
6 One fifth of Steps, _ Scott-Lee (4)
7 Ex-footballer turned commentator, _ Shearer (4)
8 _ Roots, reggae musician who shot to fame on Dragons' Den (4)
9 Two and a Half Men star, _ Kutcher (6)
13 Life of Pi director, Ang _ (3)
14 _ Latifah, American rapper and actress (5)
15 Formula One champion, _ Hamilton (5)
17 Wild At Heart and Hollyoaks actress (4-2,6)
19 Jennifer _, jewellery designer and Mrs Tobey Maguire (5)
20 Former Take That member, _ Orange (5)
21 Nickname of Motorhead musician born Ian Kilmister (5)
22 Survival expert Ray _ (5)
26 _ Bon Jovi, rock singer (3)
28 Iconic musical performer, _ Streisand (6)
31 _ Arterton, Funny Woman actress (5)
32 See 33 Down
33 Knocked Up and This Is 40 actor (4,4)
34 Ms Kunis, Ukraine-born actress (4)
35 _ Jackman, Aussie who starred in Les Miserables (4)
36 Alex James and Damon Albarn's rock group (4)

CODEWORD

The number in each square corresponds to a letter. Work out the words in the grid using the letters provided. Fill in these known letters first, then use skill and judgement to work out the others.

1

20	19	21	3	■	■	7	■	■	18	10	24	7
■	16	■	■	11	6	18	16	7	■	4	■	8
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21	■	13	■	■	■	20	■	18	■	■	■	7
19	10	23	■	17	19	10	12	8	4	16	19	■
25	■	6	■	11	■	14	■	6	■	■	4	■
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A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

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7	15	12	■	■	■	15	■	■	23	14	16	12
6	■	14	■	18	20	16	7	■	■	13	■	11
■	15	26	11	14	■	16	■	9	20	26	24	14
■	■	■	■	12	■	14	■	15	■	■	■	■
22 P	15	21	20	14	■	18	■	4	8	26	19	■
20 U	■	20	■	■	8	4	8	14	■	14	■	15
13	14	6	5	■	■	11	■	■	■	10	15	18
15	■	10	■	12	5	14	18	8	11	8	■	22
16	■	14	■	3	■	■	15	■	■	20	■	11
3	8	5	16	14	4	8	25	■	17	5	6	19

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

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						U		P				

SAMURAI SUDOKU

Normal sudoku rules apply for all five 9x9 sudokus, but the 9x9 inner sudoku shares four of its 3x3 boxes with those of the outside sudokus.

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EASY SUDOKU 1

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	5	9				6		4
8			5		6	9	2	
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	9	8		2	4			5

HARD SUDOKU 1

			6					
					5	9	2	
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7				3	9			4
	9	2					5	
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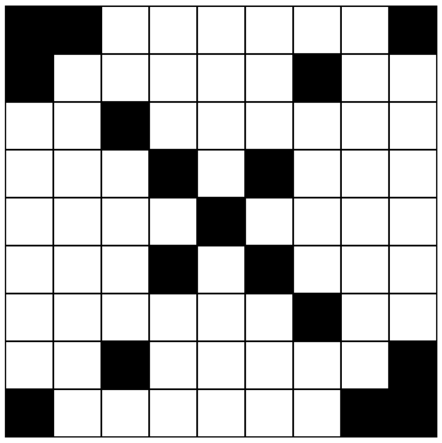
NUMBERFIT 1

NUMBERFIT 2

Use logic to fit the listed numbers below into the corresponding grid.



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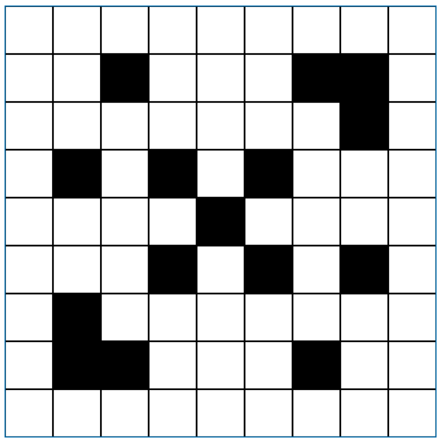
8 digits: 34010588 68801052



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ALPHADOKU 1

A 9 x 9 sudoku with the letters R to Z.

			T					
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S	Y	U						
		R		X	Y	U		Z
			R					
	S			U	Z		Y	
				Z				W
			W	V	X		T	
								U

EASY SUDOKU 2

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	3				9		4	5
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		6			5	7		4

HARD SUDOKU 2

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			9		1			
	4	1		5		9		
1			5		8			
			3				6	2
		4					8	

ALPHADOKU 2

A 9 x 9 sudoku with the letters R to Z.

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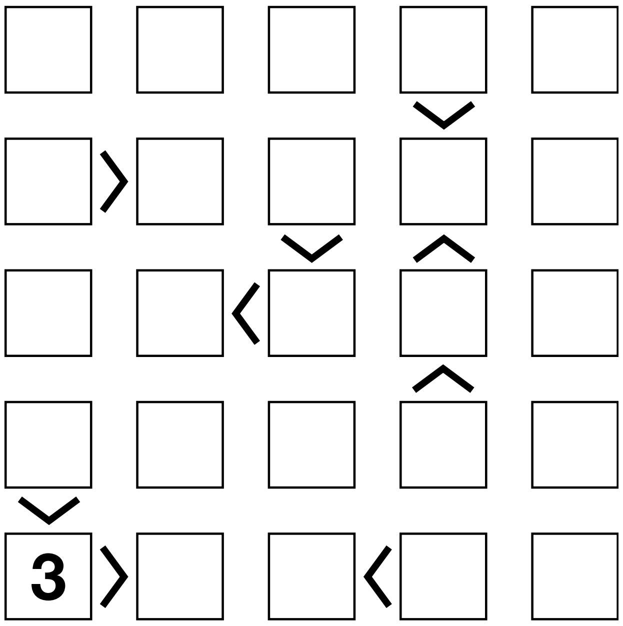
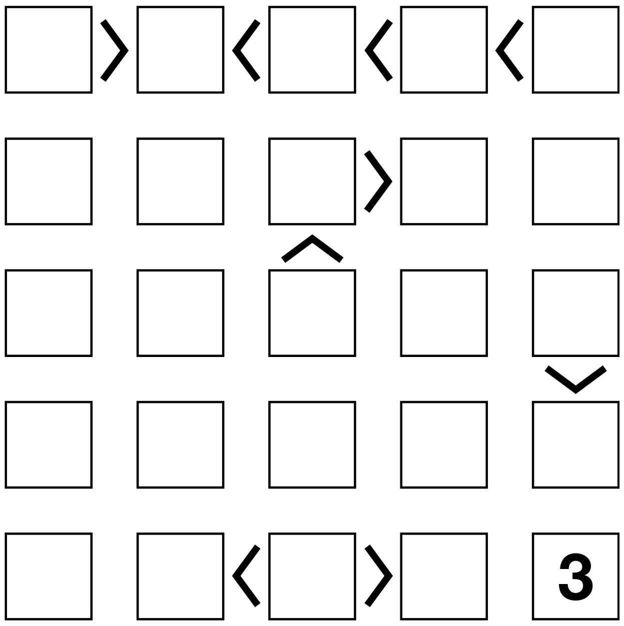
	Z	R		V	S		X	
						U		T
								X
U			S		X		V	
	V			Y		W		
V	Y		W	X				
X	U	T						
				T				

FUTOSHIKI 1

FUTOSHIKI 2

Insert the numbers one to five in each row and each column, making sure that no number is repeated. The only symbols to guide you are the “greater than” (>) and “less than” (<) signs.

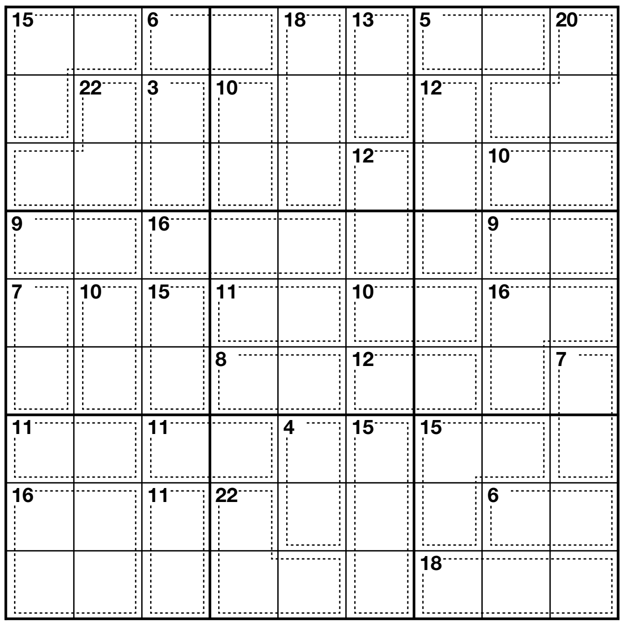




KILLER SUDOKU 1

KILLER SUDOKU 2

Each row and column hold the numbers 1 to 9 and the numbers in the cages must add to the given total. No number can be repeated in a cage.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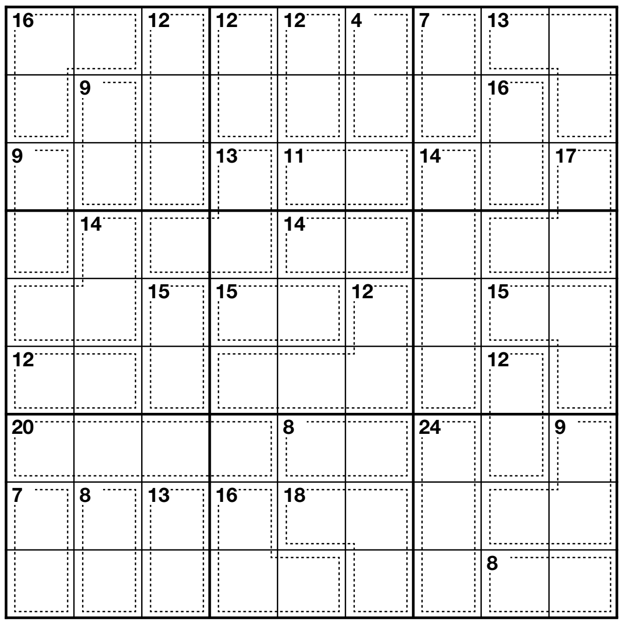
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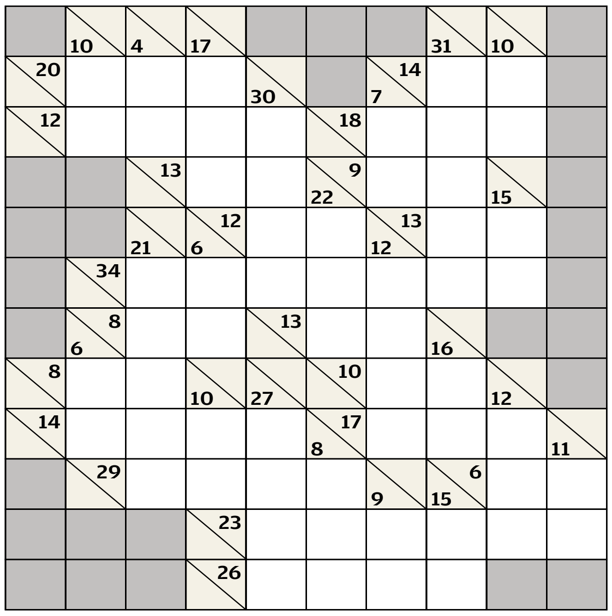
KAKURO 1

KAKURO 2

Fill in each series of blank squares using the numbers 1 to 9. Each series – across and down – must add up to the number in the shaded box at the beginning or top of the series. A number may be repeated in each line but not in a series.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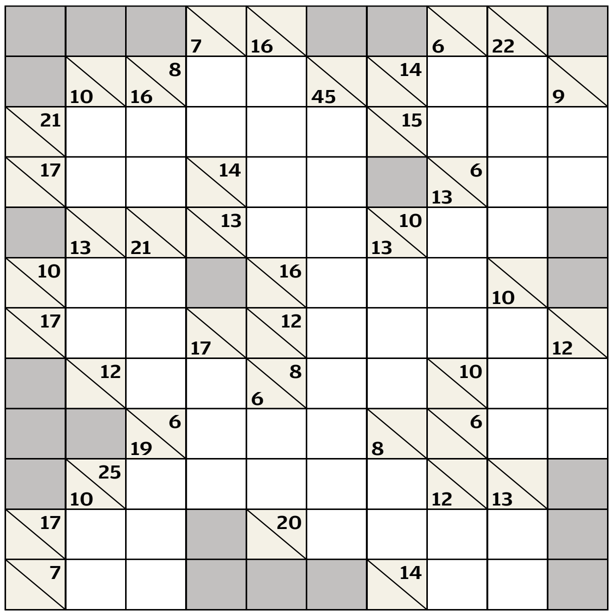
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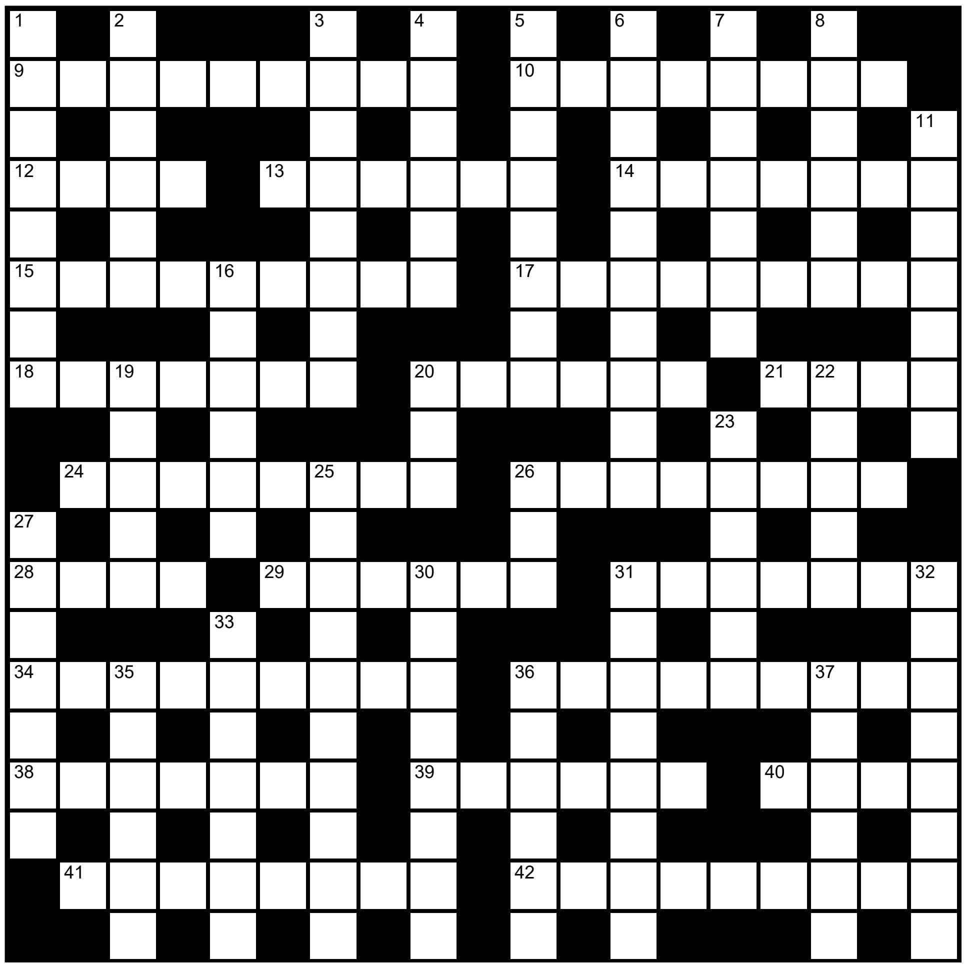
BIG CROSSWORD 1



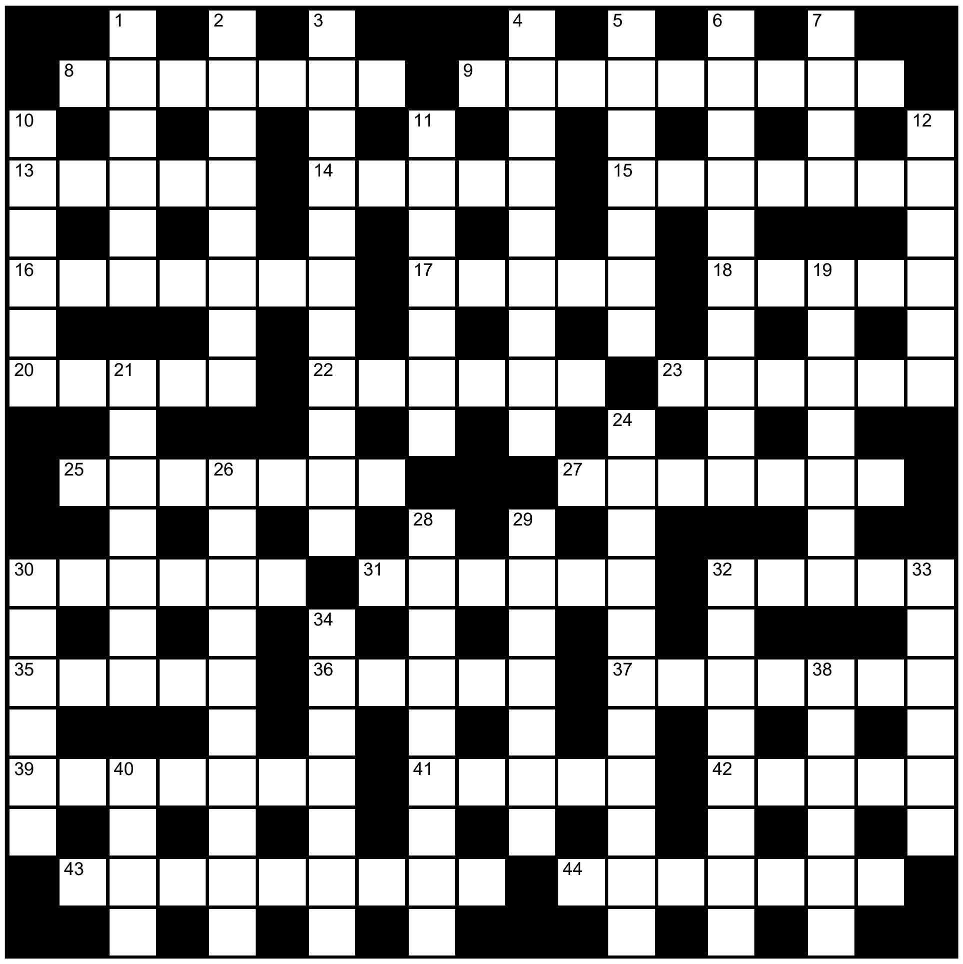
ACROSS

9 Emergency vehicle (9)
10 Strategic (8)
12 Eye part (4)
13 Choose (6)
14 European language (7)
15 Forgetful (9)
17 Octopus' limb-like organs (9)
18 Obvious (7)
20 Whispering or rubbing sound (6)
21 Healthy (4)
24 Refused (8)
26 Abnormal (8)
28 Routine (4)
29 Change (6)
31 Idle talk (7)
34 French cheese (9)
36 Flower (9)
38 Plead (7)
39 Cashier (6)
40 Loosen (4)
41 Famous (8)
42 Remove (9)

DOWN

1 Forbearance (8)
2 Receding (6)
3 Fascination (8)
4 Proper (6)
5 Laws (8)
6 Film script (10)
7 Sketch (7)
8 Of a people (6)
11 Prickly plant (7)
16 Models (6)
19 Sluggish (5)
20 Free (3)
22 Precise (5)
23 Optical illusion (6)
25 Sickening (10)
26 Wonder (3)
27 Fern (7)
30 Height (8)
31 Pitiful (8)
32 Worker (8)
33 Ruler (7)
35 Substance (6)
36 Projectile (6)
37 Swindler informally (3,3)

BIG CROSSWORD 2



ACROSS

8 Luxurious railway coach (7)
9 Embolden (9)
13 Dance to this (5)
14 Craftiness, cunning (5)
15 Obscure (7)
16 Art of paper folding (7)
17 Light motorcycle (5)
18 Fibbers (5)
20 Therefore (5)
22 Hair colour (6)
23 Punctuation mark (6)
25 Austere (7)
27 Epicure (7)
30 Pair (6)
31 Roguish child (6)
32 Woolly animal (5)
35 Foe (5)
36 External (5)
37 Food (7)
39 More than a few (7)
41 Mock (5)
42 Grown-up (5)
43 Snap fastener (5,4)
44 Plunder (7)

DOWN

1 Breakfast food (6)
2 Obstruct the way to (8)
3 Nitrous oxide (8,3)
4 Translate orally (9)
5 Domed building (7)
6 One who builds walls (10)
7 Eye up (4)
10 Opposite of rough (6)
11 Gemstone (7)
12 Jail (6)
19 Attain (7)
21 Planet (7)
24 Forged (11)
26 Form of motor sport (10)
28 Horribly distorted (9)
29 Cigar (7)
30 Gorgonzola, for example (6)
32 Appropriate (8)
33 Former Spanish currency (6)
34 Unemployed (7)
38 Saloon bar (6)
40 Doing word (4)

TWO-SPEED CROSSWORD

This two-speed crossword has two sets of clues, but just one grid

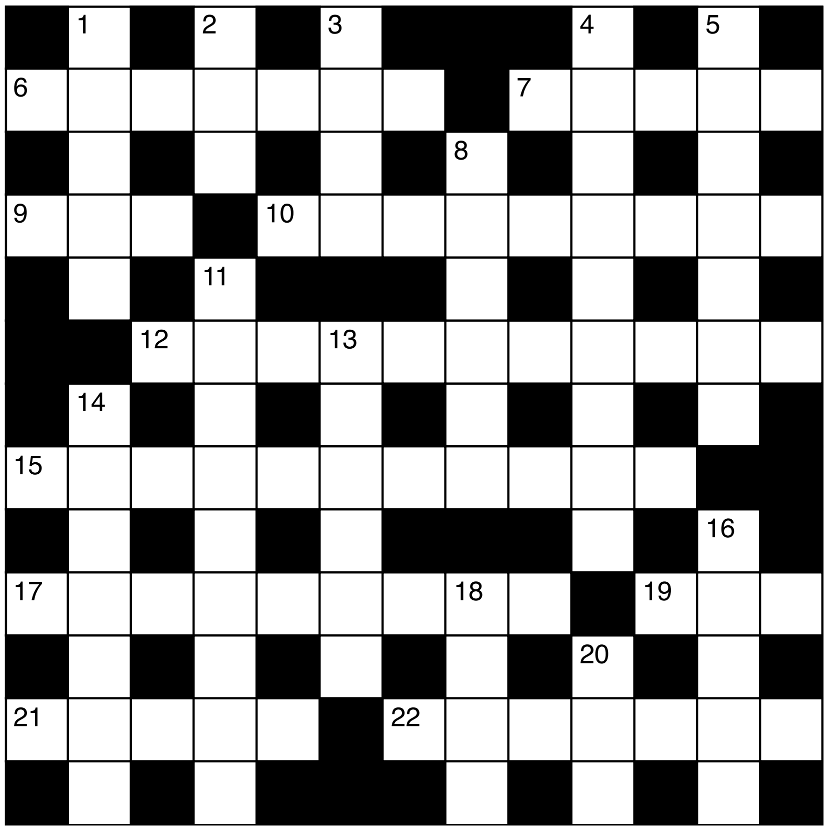
CRYPTIC CLUES

ACROSS

6. Striking contests? (7)
7. Fix limits to jump (5)
9. It is done in protracted ways (3)
10. Interruption in distress brings collapse (9)
12. He was pipped at the post as many let short time slip (5,6)
15. Happy girl holds ball? (5,3,3)
17. Impress with peculiar deed – put herd into panic (9)
19. Hint it may need chalk at the end of 20 (3)
21. Agencies that give me help in return (5)
22. Lack of water should be seen by doctor (7)

DOWN

1. When soldiers are on the move? (5)
2. Being very cold, it would need merely adding in fairness (3)
3. Beast of burden? (4)
4. Man wielding baton could carry shocking force (9)
5. New unit to unravel (7)
8. Presumably what he breeds is on the up and up (6)
11. Letters under union ban? It's a crime! (9)
13. Make less harsh sibilant frequently (6)
14. Laurel is bare, yet changed (3,4)
16. Just claim of Conservatives (5)
18. Republic shows anger with the orient (4)
20. Hint taken by striking player (3)



QUICK CLUES

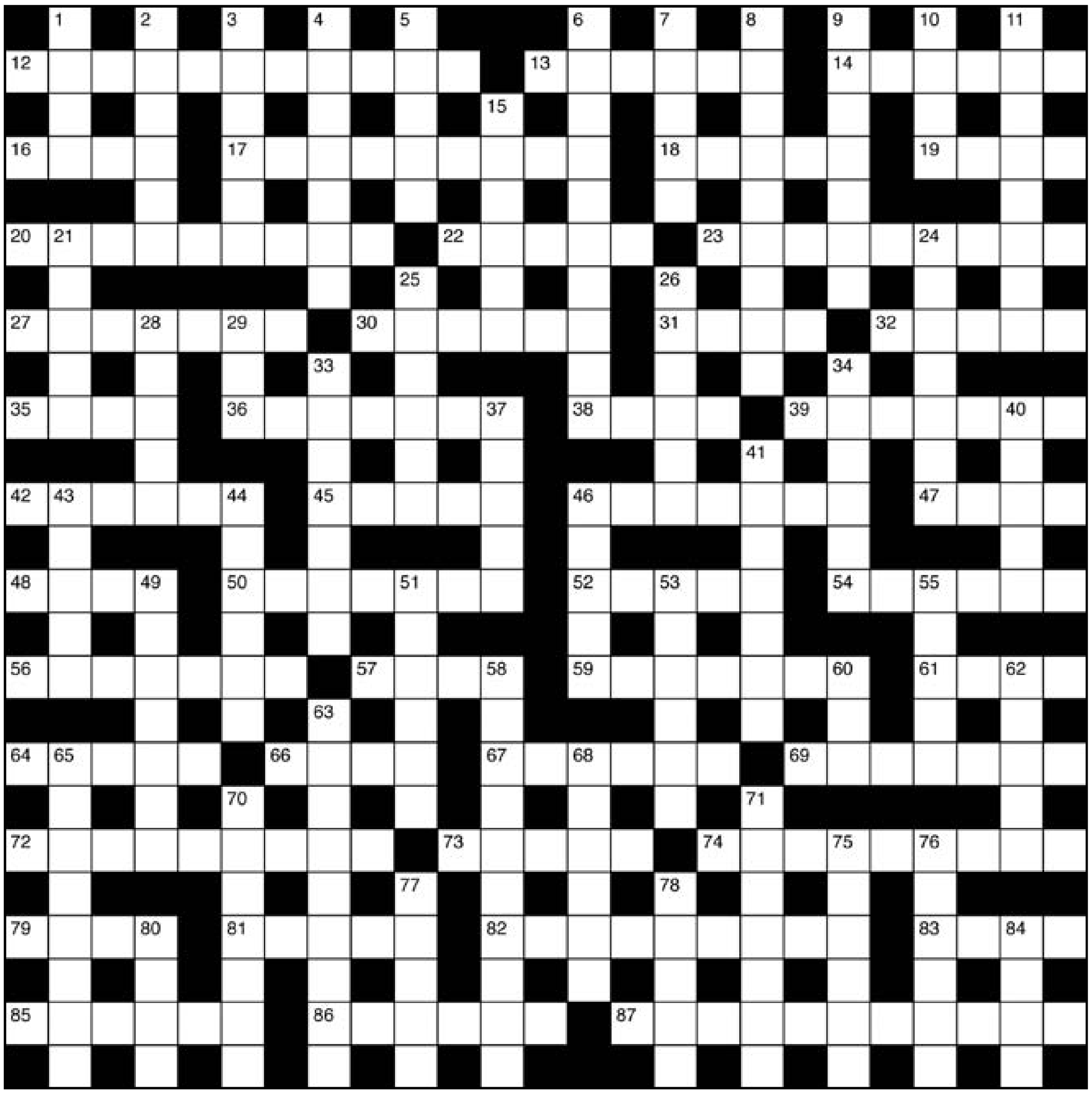
ACROSS

6. Games (7)
7. Tied (5)
9. Deed (3)
10. Collapse (9)
12. Strong runner-up (5,6)
15. Jump about in happiness (5,3,3)
17. Ran headlong (9)
19. Summit (3)
21. Means (5)
22. Shortage (7)

DOWN

1. Month (5)
2. Frozen water (3)
3. Carry (4)
4. Bus official (9)
5. Untwist (7)
8. Elevator (6)
11. Extort (9)
13. Make milder (6)
14. Laurel (3,4)
16. Correct (5)
18. Ireland (4)
20. Prompt (3)

JUMBO CROSSWORD



ACROSS

12. Irritable (3-8)
13. Rubbish (6)
14. Sport (6)
16. Celebrity (4)
17. All in all (2,7)
18. Assumed (3,2)
19. Unhappy (4)
20. Disturbed (9)
22. Mad (5)
23. Pen (9)
27. Enterprising (2-5)
30. Inn (6)
31. Pinnacle (4)
32. Business (5)
35. Stand (4)
36. Excessively (3,4)
38. Mistake (4)
39. Turns up (7)
42. Conducts (6)
45. Break (5)
46. Wishes (7)
47. Female sheep (4)
48. Skip (4)
50. Entertained (7)
52. Beats (5)
54. Hut (6)
56. Period (7)
57. Bark (4)
59. Singer (7)
61. Catch (4)
64. Cooker (5)
66. Gala (4)
67. Rescue (6)
69. Abstain (7)
72. Interrupts (4,5)
73. Nonsense (5)
74. Belittle (9)
79. Golf shot (4)
81. Send (5)
82. Crazy (2,3,4)
83. Fools (4)
85. Assuredly (6)
86. Usual (6)
87. Finishing work (8,3)

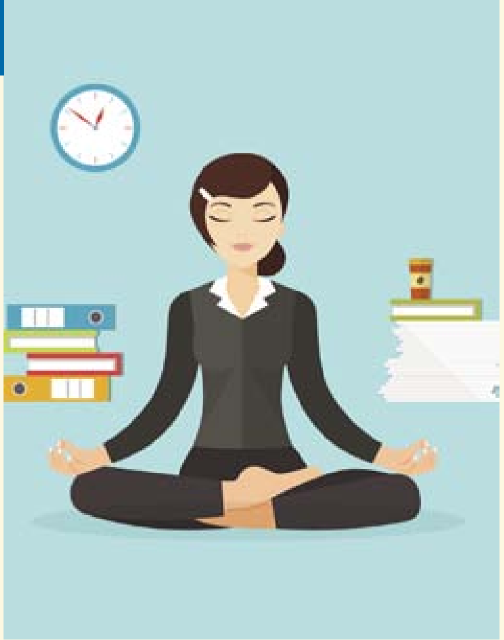
DOWN

1. Plan (4)
2. Accuse (6)
3. Meaning (6)
4. Muttered (7)
5. Meted out (5)
6. Resolves (10)
7. Questions (5)
8. Meaning (7,2)
9. Hint (7)
10. Was in debt (4)
11. Responded (8)
15. Promise (6)
21. Hangman's halter (5)
24. Waiting (7)
25. Book (6)
26. Bound (6)
28. Animal (5)
29. Fitting (3)
33. Give (7)
34. Levers (6)
37. Unpopular (5)
40. Happening (5)
41. Glass (7)
43. Move (5)
44. Hit (6)
46. Annoys (5)
49. Bundles (7)
51. Touched down (6)
53. Surpassed (6)
55. Flower (5)
58. Certain (10)
60. Number (3)
62. Frightening (5)
63. Scold (9)
65. Pathetic (8)
68. Figures (6)
70. Travesty (7)
71. Money (7)
75. White (6)
76. Abdicate (6)
77. Shop (5)
78. Denoted (5)
80. Peep (4)
84. Blow (4)

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Can you spot the six differences between these two pictures?

A



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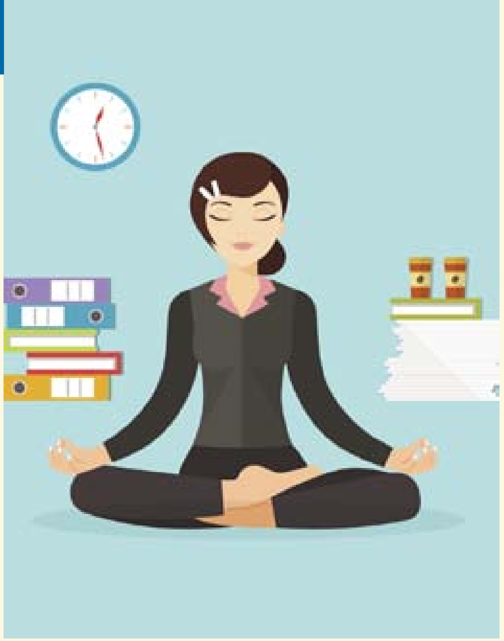


NUMBERCRUNCH

Follow the instructions from left to right, starting with the number given to reach an answer at the end of the row

BEGINNER 52	50% of this	-14	×5	-27	2/3 of this	+46	÷4	+25	ANSWER

INTERMEDIATE 94	+155	2/3 of this	+37	6/7 of this	-53	Take the square root	+341	75% of this	ANSWER

ADVANCED 384	Increase by 25%	-128	Reverse the digits	9/11 of this	-188	Square it	+45	÷14	ANSWER

GIANT SUDOKU

Every row, every column and every 5 x 5 box must contain every digit from 1 to 9 and every letter from K to Z.

	Y		O	X	L	P	9				Z				U				5	K	T			8
R	U			S							X		P						W	Y		Z	L	
	V		W	P			N	Y		S			5							4		X	R	
1	6				W			4						N				R			3		9	
K	Q			Z	R								U	4				S	7	O			5	
7		2							O	Z			M		V			1	S		Y		X	Q
	8			4			S	Q	U			X					Z				1		O	K
Q	5							1			V		2	8	L	7	4		M	T			U	9
						T	5		4			W			P		8	X	Y		2	M		Z
	M			K	N		L			7				S	3			O	2		P	4		
2	L						X		W		Y	M				N			3	Z			S	
O				8			T			P	R	6	X	K			V		1	U		7	4	
N			Y		8							2	L			M	R	7				V	1	
				Q				R	P	3						X		L		8				T
3					2				S	4		7					P	Z		R	K			
					T		6		2	M		9	W	Z		R		P	X			1	K	
S			R	3	U		M	L	5		4					T								
		7	X					9	3				R	6	8		K		U					
9	P			6		8	1		Z				S	U	2	Q	W	V		5			3	4
			Q		V		R	K	7	T	P					5		9			L	O		6
V	O			Y			3	5					Q	W					Z				M	
W			5		4	1	8						T	Y			S			2		L		3
T	2	Z						S	Q		M			O	N		U		4			R	6	5
				N				7	9		U			3	X		Y		8	V			P	O
P									M	6		5	Z	X		1	L	2				8		

MEDIUM SUDOKU 1

		5	8		4			1
	7					6		8
		9			6		3	
5	8			4				
			6		1		5	
		6		7			2	3
	2				7	1		
6		7		8			9	4
1			4		5		8	

VERY HARD SUDOKU 1

				3		2		
9	6				2	7		
	2		1				8	
1				4				3
	7						5	
3				2				6
	1				7		9	
		5	8				6	7
		7		9				

CROSS OUT 1

CROSS OUT 2

Cross out one of the two letters in each divided square to reveal a completed crossword grid.

J/R	I/E	W/S	E/T	S/L
Y/A		C/H		L/O
T/P	O/A	U/O	R/L	S/Y
D/A		B/S		W/E
R/N	O/E	A/E	G/D	S/Y

C/H	Y/O	C/P	J/O	A/E
E/O		E/J		P/B
R/S	A/H	D/A	D/I	Y/O
D/T		S/C		C/S
S/A	T/M	T/E	G/P	S/H

IMPOSSUDOKU 1

		5		3	6			
3	2		7	4	9			
	9					8		5
	4	3				7	6	
1		7					3	
			5	1	3		7	6
			6	2		9		

MEDIUM SUDOKU 2

6					9			1
	5			2			3	
		3			5	7		
7		2	1		6			5
	9				4		2	
	1		3		2	4		9
2		5	7			8		
				5				
1		4	9			2		7

VERY HARD SUDOKU 2

	6						4	5
1				6				
		5	3			1		
		4			8	2		7
				4			9	
5		1	9			8		
		6			7	3		
				2				9
7	3						8	

IMPOSSUDOKU 2

5					2		1	
				4		5		8
			8		6		4	
		8				3		4
	2						5	
3		1				8		
	3		5		9			
2		6		7				
	4		3					9

PATHFINDER 1

PATHFINDER 2

From the top corner, make a path of words linked to the theme. The trail goes through each letter once but never diagonally.

Spielberg films

T	B	E	R	I	D	O	F	A	T	Y	A	N	S	C
H	A	L	B	S	G	E	S	V	E	R	S	R	E	H
E	F	M	A	N	N	I	P	I	G	N	L	I	L	I
C	L	A	L	O	C	L	I	R	P	I	T	S	D	N
A	T	N	N	T	H	S	E	S	A	V	J	K	T	H
H	C	I	M	R	E	O	R	T	A	R	U	O	S	E
M	F	Y	O	E	T	P	E	R	S	S	H	O	U	G
E	I	C	U	I	N	I	T	Y	C	I	K	L	R	A
J	K	A	N	M	O	R	I	A	P	A	R	A	P	R
A	R	A	O	L	E	H	D	R	L	S	E	N	X	E
W	S	T	S	N	T	T	E	R	A	T	R	D	E	S
L	C	E	N	U	E	F	O	S	I	R	R	E	T	S
O	S	E	C	O	R	S	H	E	E	X	A	T	H	E
N	I	R	I	E	H	O	T	E	L	T	R	R	O	C
D	K	D	H	T	T	F	T	E	P	R	U	P	L	O

British artists

L	N	F	H	N	C	S	T	J	O	W	I	L	L	I
U	A	R	O	J	O	N	A	N	H	N	D	E	K	A
C	I	E	U	D	Y	R	B	E	I	L	O	R	A	M
M	L	O	O	C	L	E	L	W	G	I	T	O	L	B
A	N	H	O	K	W	B	E	S	O	F	H	A	R	E
U	H	M	A	I	I	H	R	I	T	A	E	U	N	Y
N	H	O	M	L	L	C	H	G	A	N	S	H	O	L
T	T	S	A	N	S	R	O	U	I	N	O	F	S	D
I	V	G	A	I	B	O	A	B	N	G	J	R	S	B
D	A	D	R	O	W	P	R	N	O	R	R	A	I	A
H	O	H	T	E	T	E	B	A	T	I	A	N	C	C
K	C	B	R	G	R	H	A	R	G	N	C	A	N	O
N	E	Y	I	D	I	L	I	S	L	E	O	R	J	O
B	B	S	E	O	E	E	A	I	M	O	N	E	V	H
S	U	T	G	R	G	Y	L	L	T	T	E	R	E	N

WORDSEARCH 1

WORDSEARCH 2

Find 11 words in the left and 13 words in the right grid.

Nursery rhyme characters

E	U	L	B	Y	O	B	V	L	J
O	N	I	J	H	C	L	Y	D	A
F	A	B	C	L	L	S	R	B	C
G	M	M	G	I	S	F	M	U	K
E	E	O	J	U	O	Z	S	R	H
O	I	U	P	S	I	M	O	N	O
R	P	S	T	J	F	E	O	I	R
G	J	E	N	N	Y	W	R	E	N
Y	R	M	K	G	J	P	L	L	E
P	E	T	E	R	P	I	P	E	R

Pop stars with a single name

Y	E	S	S	I	R	R	O	M	A
R	G	G	N	I	T	S	C	N	M
N	E	A	K	S	N	Z	A	B	E
E	A	H	B	X	I	S	U	J	N
L	N	N	C	R	T	L	P	O	I
L	N	N	D	A	I	R	E	R	M
Y	O	I	C	V	I	E	S	K	E
V	D	I	E	N	K	K	L	C	J
O	A	M	C	W	O	H	W	L	Y
Q	M	E	C	N	O	Y	E	B	E

ARROWWORD 1

Hedgerow plant Molten rock		Walkways		Desperate demand		Part of a ship	
				Alkaline solution			
Carve into metal		Golf peg Toothed wheel				Direct journey	
				Biblical vessel Sepulchre			
Compere Thick mist					Neither		Stitch
			Duty				
Coloured liquid		Behave theatrically					
			Steep tea leaves				

ARROWWORD 2

Explosive material Legend		Darkness		Actress, _ Barrymore		Ban	
				Type of deer			
Thick paper		Hatchet Agent				Port-au-Prince's country	
				Which person? _ Douglas, US actor			
Humble Fruit seed					Rubbish container		Hardened
			Wading bird				
Flat-topped hat		Banal					
			Interlock loops of wool				

SOLUTIONS

PAGE ONE

ENTERTAINMENT CROSSWORD

Across: 1 Mathew; 4 Mulligan; 10 Candice; 11 Sebastian; 12 Hilton; 16 Cheryl; 18 Louie; 19 Minaj; 22 Mac; 23 Emily; 24 Steve; 25 Ben; 27 Robin; 29 Marco; 30 Eamonn; 31 Gerard; 37 Val Kilmer; 38 Douglas; 39 Flanagan; 40 Sharon.
Down: 1 Michael Buble; 2 Tony; 3 Elie; 5 Urban; 6 Lisa; 7 Alan; 8 Levi; 9 Ashton; 13 Lee; 14 Queen; 15 Lewis; 17 Lucy-Jo Hudson; 19 Meyer; 20 Jason; 21 Lemmy; 22 Mears; 26 Jon; 28 Barbra; 31 Gemma; 32 Rudd; 33 Paul; 34 Mila; 35 Hugh; 36 Blur.

CODEWORD

1

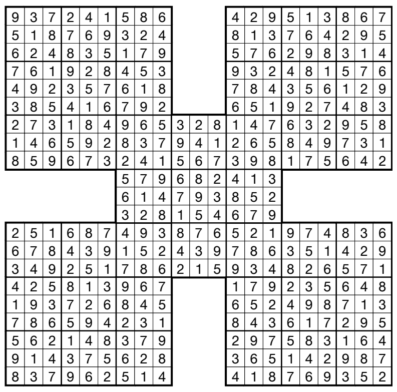
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
D	V	B	I	K	O	S	T	X	A	H	F	N
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
L	Y	E	C	P	R	G	U	Z	J	W	M	Q

2

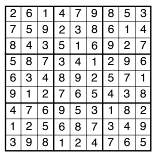
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
C	W	H	B	R	A	K	O	J	V	L	T	N
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
E	I	S	F	M	Y	U	Q	P	Z	G	X	D

PAGES TWO AND THREE:

SAMURAI SUDOKU



EASY SUDOKU

1


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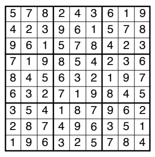
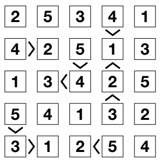


FUTOSHIKI

1


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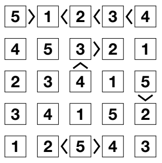

NUMBERFIT

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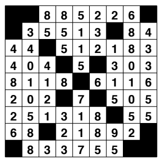

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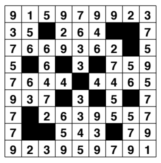

KAKURO

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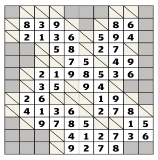

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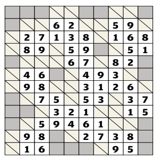

HARD SUDOKU

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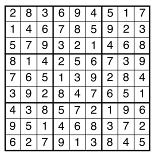

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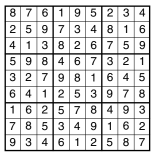

KILLER SUDOKU

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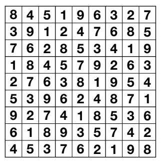

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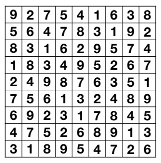

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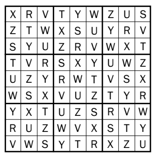

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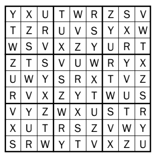


PAGES FOUR AND FIVE:

BIG CROSSWORD 1

Across: 9 Ambulance, 10 Tactical, 12 Iris, 13 Select, 14 English, 15 Negligent, 17 Tentacles, 18 Evident, 20 Rustle, 21 Well, 24 Declined, 26 Atypical, 28 Rote, 29 Mutate, 31 Prattle, 34 Camembert, 36 Buttercup, 38 Entreat, 39 Teller, 40 Undo, 41 Renowned, 42 Eliminate.
Down: 1 Patience, 2 Ebbing, 3 Interest, 4 Decent, 5 Statutes, 6 Screenplay, 7 Diagram, 8 Racial, 11 Thistle, 16 Ideals, 19 Inert, 20 Rid, 22 Exact, 23 Mirage, 25 Nauseating, 26 Awe, 27 Bracken, 30 Altitude, 31 Pathetic, 32 Employee, 33 Emperor, 35 Matter, 36 Bullet, 37 Con man.

BIG CROSSWORD 2

Across: 8 Pullman, 9 Encourage, 13 Music, 14 Guile, 15 Unclear, 16 Origami, 17 Moped, 18 Liars, 20 Hence, 22 Ginger, 23 Hyphen, 25 Spartan, 27 Gourmet, 30 Couple, 31 Urchin, 32 Sheep, 35 Enemy, 36 Outer, 37 Edibles, 39 Several, 41 Scoff, 42 Adult, 43 Press stud, 44 Pillage.
Down: 1 Muesli, 2 Blockade, 3 Laughing gas, 4 Interpret, 5 Rotunda, 6 Bricklayer, 7 Ogle, 10 Smooth, 11 Diamond, 12 Prison, 19 Achieve, 21 Neptune, 24 Counterfeit, 26 Rallycross, 28 Grotesque, 29 Cheroot, 30 Cheese, 32 Suitable, 33 Peseta, 34 Jobless, 38 Lounge, 40 Verb.

JUMBO CROSSWORD

Across: 12 Ill-humoured; 13 Refuse; 14 Rowing; 16 Star; 17 On balance; 18 Put on; 19 Down; 20 Unsettled; 22 Barmy; 23 Enclosure; 27 Go-ahead; 30 Tavern; 31 Peak; 32 Trade; 35 Bear; 36 Too much; 38 Slip; 39 Arrives; 42 Ushers; 45 Split; 46 Regards; 47 Ewes; 48 Miss; 50 Regaled; 52 Licks; 54 Shanty; 56 Stretch; 57 Snap; 59 Soprano; 61 Trap; 64 Stove; 66 Fete; 67 Redeem; 69 Refrain; 72 Cuts short; 73 Bilge; 74 Disparage; 79 Chip; 81 Remit; 82 Up the wall; 83 Saps; 85 Indeed; 86 Normal; 87 Knocking off.
Down: 1 Plot; 2 Charge; 3 Import; 4 Mumbled; 5 Dealt; 6 Determines; 7 Pumps; 8 Getting at; 9 Wrinkle; 10 Owed; 11 Answered; 15 Engage; 21 Noose; 24 Service; 25 Manual; 26 Spring; 28 Horse; 29 Apt; 33 Consign; 34 Prises; 37 Hated; 40 Event; 41 Crystal; 43 Shift; 44 Struck; 46 Riles; 49 Sheaves; 51 Landed; 53 Capped; 55 Aster; 58 Particular; 60 One; 62 Awing; 63 Reprimand; 65 Touching; 68 Digits; 70 Charade; 71 Finance; 75 Pallid; 76 Resign; 77 Store; 78 Meant; 80 Peek; 84 Puff.

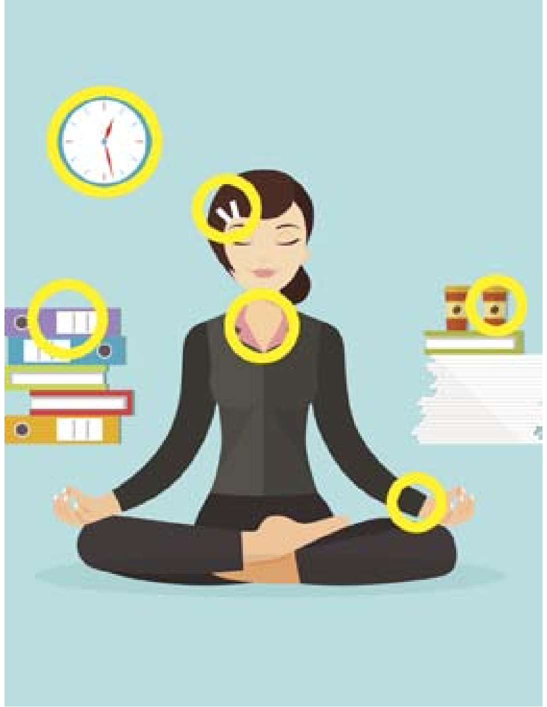
TWO-SPEED

Across: 6 Matches; 7 Bound; 9 Act; 10 Breakdown; 12 Close second; 15 Dance for joy; 17 Stampeded; 19 Tip; 21 Media; 22 Drought.
Down: 1 March; 2 Ice; 3 Bear; 4 Conductor; 5 Untwine; 8 Raiser; 11 Blackmail; 13 Soften; 14 Bay tree; 16 Right; 18 Eire; 20 Cue.

NUMBERCRUNCH

Beginner 42
Intermediate 264
Advanced 29

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



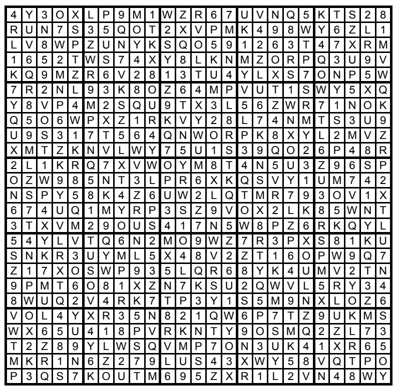
PAGES SIX AND SEVEN:

PATHFINDER

1 The Fabelmans, Bridge of Spies, Lincoln, The Terminal, Catch Me If You Can, Minority Report, Saving Private Ryan, Schindler's List, Jurassic Park, Hook, The Sugarland Express, The Color Purple, E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Jaws, Close Encounters of the Third Kind.

2 Lucian Freud, John Constable, Beryl Cook, William Holman Hunt, Thomas Gainsborough, Chris Ofili, Gwen John, William Blake, Dorothea Tanning, Joshua Reynolds, Francis Bacon, John Everett Millais, Leonora Carrington, Barbara Hepworth, David Hockney, Bridget Riley, George Stubbs.

GIANT SUDOKU



MEDIUM SUDOKU

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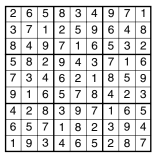

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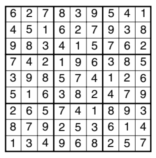

IMPOSSUDOKU

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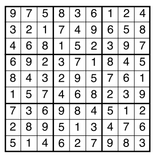

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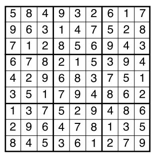

ARROWWORD

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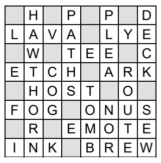

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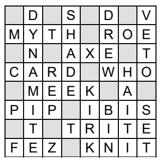

VERY HARD SUDOKU

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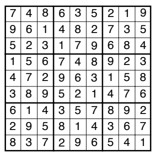

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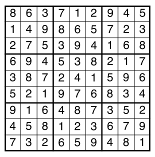

CROSS OUT

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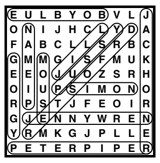

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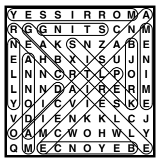

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Fever Pitch

YOUR FOOTBALL WEEKEND STARTS HERE

ALWAYS A HERO Diogo is fondly remembered by both Wolves and Liverpool supporters

Today we are all Team Jota

FAMILY WILL FEEL THE LOVE

BY **PAUL GORST**

ARNE SLOT says he hopes the depth of feeling from everyone connected to Liverpool towards Diogo Jota is a source of comfort to his family, as the late forward's sons get set for an emotional welcome at Anfield.

The Reds today meet Wolves, Jota's other former Premier League club, for what is the first fixture between the two since the popular Portuguese died in a car accident with his brother, Andre Silva, in early July.

The striker's wife, Rute, will attend with Jota's sons, Dinis and Duarte, set to be mascots.

Slot said: "It is normal at this time of year to look back to everything that has happened.

"Doing so leads me to think especially of the family of Diogo Jota on what will be their first Christmas without him. It is not my place to tell them where they should look for comfort – if that is even possible – but I can only hope that the feeling of love that Diogo still generates brings them some solace."

MATCH PREVIEW: PAGES 2-3

EAGLES EYE THREE IN A ROW AGAINST TOTTENHAM – SEE PAGE 4

BRENTFORD v BOURNEMOUTH

Premier League: KO 3pm

LOW POINT
Cherries have a poor record against Bees under manager Iraola

IRAOLA OUT OF COMFORT ZONE

BY **DARREN WELLS**

ANDONI IRAOLA expects his Bournemouth side will have to get comfortable being uncomfortable as they bid to shake their losing run in today's "difficult" clash at Brentford.

The Cherries head to west London without a win in eight Premier League games, although they have drawn their last three.

Only one point separates the two teams in the table and Brentford have lost just once at home all season – a narrow 1-0 defeat to Manchester City at the start of October.

Cherries boss Iraola has also seen his side lose each of the last four meetings against Brentford, which followed a draw in his first ever fixture against them.

Iraola said: "They are a very good football team and have very good players.

"They are doing well and for us it is one of the most difficult games because we've had very bad results against them, and we've only had one point in the time I've been here.

"They've scored a lot of late goals against us. Every game I see from Brentford at home, the opposition normally is uncomfortable.

"I hope we are at a very high level because it's a really demanding game."

Bees head coach Keith Andrews warned his side must be ready to match Bournemouth's "high-octane" approach at the Gtech Community Stadium.

Having seen the manner in which Iraola's side battled to a thrilling 4-4 draw at Manchester United in their previous away match, Andrews is not expecting an easy ride in the first of back-to-back home games.

"They have a very defined way of playing. I like the way they play – it is high-octane," Andrews (with Keane Lewis-Potter, below) said.

"You have to earn results against them, with the types of actions they have. They really test you if you are not on your game.

"They have got some key individuals. They are very difficult opponents and we will need to be absolutely ready."

Brentford's 2-0 victory at bottom-club Wolves last weekend saw them close up on the top half of the table.

And Andrews added: "Where we are now, we are content to a point, but equally we want to improve and keep pushing, so we will see what happens."

HUGO FITS THE BILL

Ekitike backed to lead line after getting himself strong for Prem

LIVERPOOL v WOLVES

Premier League: Kick-off 3pm

BY **PAUL GORST**

ARNE SLOT has backed Hugo Ekitike to stay fit and firing during Alexander Isak's recovery from a broken leg as the Liverpool striker leads the line against Wolves today.

Ekitike (right), who has scored five goals in his last three Premier League appearances, is now Slot's only available senior centre-forward after Isak had surgery at a time when Cody Gakpo is sidelined and Mohamed Salah is with Egypt at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Slot also pointed to Federico Chiesa's availability but the versatile Italian has made just one Premier League start for the Reds since his move in August 2024.

Isak will be out for months after undergoing surgery last week following the injury he picked up in the 2-1 win at Tottenham. And Slot said of Ekitike: "He's shown a lot of hard work to get to this fitness level.

"It sometimes took us a bit of convincing [him] that all this is actually really needed to become stronger, but he always did it.

"Not always with a smile on his face, but he's worked really hard to get fitter on and off the pitch. I've tried to convince him as well that the better you defend a set-piece, the bigger chance you have to score a goal at the other end.

"If it's 0-0, it's easier to score a goal than when you're 1-0 down. This might sound strange but what it does for the energy levels of the other team is a difference. For him to score goals, it's also important we hardly concede from set-pieces. He's worked really hard to get where he is now and I think he's ready to go into the programme we are facing, but he's not the only No.9 I have.

"Federico Chiesa can also play in that position so I have the chance to take him off if he's completely tired."

Slot added: "The main thing that has changed [during a six-game unbeaten run], apart from the second half at Brighton, is that we haven't conceded as many chances as we did in the run we had before.

"I also think we've been a bit more lucky than in the games before.

"We played games where we were so much better than the other team. The main thing people always look at is chance creation against chances you've conceded.

"In the last game against Spurs, I don't think we had many more chances than them and, against Brighton, it was equal as well. But we won those two games.

"Many times, we've been so unlucky with the result. In the last two games, I wouldn't say we don't deserve it, but it was more equal than many other games we've played and lost.

"That's the nice part of football, that the performance doesn't always give you the result."

WEST HAM v FULHAM

Premier League: KO 3pm

POSITIVITY IS CRUCIAL FOR DROP BATTLE, ADMITS NUNO

BY **DARREN WELLS**

WEST HAM boss Nuno Espirito Santo wants his players to stay positive in their relegation fight, as they prepare for another "demanding" match against Fulham.

Nuno's side are still inside the drop zone and five points from safety, having not won a Premier League fixture since back-to-back victories at the beginning of November.

Meanwhile, Marco Silva's Cottagers have picked up form in recent weeks – with five league wins since the start of November and are now 10 points clear of the bottom three.

After defeat at Newcastle in the Carabao Cup quarter-finals, Fulham then closed out a 1-0 victory over Nottingham Forest, and Nuno knows there is little margin for error if West Ham are to secure a much-needed result at the London Stadium.

"Fulham are good. We saw the game [against Forest], they are playing good. It is a tough opponent," he said.

"Like all the games in the Premier League, I expect it to be very intense, very demanding.

"It will require a lot of positive actions from us [against] a tough opponent – all Premier League games are the same in that way."

Fulham boss Silva stressed his side will be anything but complacent against the Hammers. "The position in the

NO SWEAT
Ekitike training before Christmas ahead of match against Wolves

FIELD TRIP'S AN ED ACHE

ROB EDWARDS has described the daunting prospect of Wolves' trip to Anfield as a "real challenge".

Bottom-of-the table Wanderers are still searching for their first Premier League win of the campaign and face a Liverpool side who are unbeaten in their last five league outings.

Edwards (inset) said: "We're looking forward to another really difficult game, but going to Anfield is always enjoyable. It's a real challenge, it's one of the most difficult ones, but one of the ones you look to.

"It's always an incredible atmosphere there, but it's another game and another opportunity for us." Edwards revealed that Toti Gomes is set for a spell on the sidelines, while Hugo Bueno's progress will be monitored ahead of the game.

He said: "Toti's a no, he's out for a significant period of time with his hamstrings, so it'll be weeks.

"Hugo trained so we'll see how he progresses, but we're hopeful for him.

"It's a big blow for [Toti] and the team, but it's an opportunity for other people. That's just the nature of the game at the moment.

"We've had a couple of muscle injuries over the last few weeks and we have been pushing harder, maybe risking one or two bits, but it's always a shame when you get one of those."

JOTA'S SONS WILL SEE HOW MUCH FANS ADORED HIM

BY **ANDY DUNN**

IN polar opposite ways, Liverpool and Wolves have had their issues in this Premier League season.

The champions have been supposedly in some sort of crisis because they lost a few games in a sticky few weeks, and Wolves are definitely in a crisis, having developed a habit of not winning matches.

Liverpool's marquee player caused a bit of a stir because he objected to being left out of the starting line-up, the Wolves chairman felt obliged to step down after bearing the brunt of supporter dissatisfaction.

Staple stuff. Liverpool have rediscovered a bit of form and Mo Salah is away for a while on international duty, so that storyline has taken a breather.

Wolves, even under newish manager Rob Edwards, are so bad that thoughts are already turning to a Championship campaign.

And that is no bad thing. Winning games, having the football, it's what the game is all about in the end, no matter what level you are at.

Now and again, football – and following football – needs a dose of perspective.

And there will be no stronger dose than the one taken by everyone at Anfield today.

There will be no stronger dose than the one taken by the men, women and children who are there to see Dinis and Duarte, two of the three children of Diogo Jota and Rute Cardoso, join the mascots on the Anfield pitch ahead of Liverpool's game against Wolves.

"It is not my place to tell them where they should look for comfort – even if that is possible," said Arne Slot. "But I can only hope that the feeling of love and affection that Diogo still generates brings them some solace."

As usual, a manager of Liverpool Football Club finds the right words.

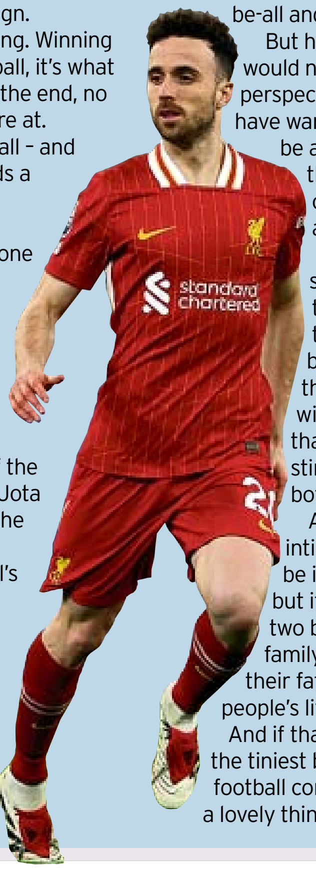
And the love and affection will be shared, in equal measure, by home fans and visiting fans. That is the measure of the unassuming, humble footballer that was Diogo Jota.

That IS Diogo Jota. Because Liverpool and Wolves will keep his memory alive.

The clubs will keep his memory alive but, more importantly, the fans will keep his memory alive. And the fans ARE the clubs.

The death of Jota (below) and his brother Andre Silva was a reminder that professional footballers – professional sportsmen and women – are not immune from tragedy or the painful vagaries of life.

And the meeting of his two English clubs should be a reminder of what is important, should be a reminder that football is not the be-all and end-all.



But here's a guess. Jota would not have wanted perspective. He would have wanted everyone to be as passionate about their team winning or losing as they always are.

And when his two sons walk out with their dad's teammates just before three o-clock this afternoon, they will feel the passion that Diogo Jota stirred among fans of both teams.

As Slot (top) intimates, comfort can be impossible to find, but it will remind the two boys and their family of the special role their father had in people's lives.

And if that provides even the tiniest bit of solace, the football community has done a lovely thing.

ODDS AND NODS

William HILL

BY **LEE PHELPS**
William Hill spokesperson

WE'RE expecting festive Final One Standing winners over the next couple of Premier League rounds, and with over a million pounds to be won, look out for who gets what.

The top six are all in action today and I've clocked a BTTS & win treble at 35/1.

I fancy Manchester City to win at Nottingham Forest – they're lethal in front of goal, with Erling Haaland in tremendous form, I can't see how they don't win.

But they have given West Ham and Crystal Palace chances in their last two games, so a consolation goal is likely for a Forest team who have lost only one home match while Sean Dyche has been manager.

I'll go Arsenal to beat Brighton, but with both teams scoring. The Gunners' first eight home games this season featured one goal conceded. Since then both teams have bagged in four of the last five at the Emirates.

The final leg is Brentford to beat a Bournemouth team whose form has dropped off, but who are well capable of scoring, as we saw in the 4-4 draw at Old Trafford.

The tea-time game is Chelsea v Aston Villa, with the Premier League's form team 3/1 to win at the Bridge, which seems a tempter given their 10-match winning streak in all competitions.

We've got a couple of good Epic Boosts, too. Haaland to score – he's got 19 in the Premier League – and Chelsea to score first versus Villa, something that's happened in every home game at Stamford Bridge since the 0-0 draw with Palace in August.

Stake limits apply and all the Ts and Cs for those and boosts on your Accas and Bet Builders, with Impact Sub are on the app.

Good luck.

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table can give you confidence, but sometimes it doesn't speak about your quality," Silva (right) said.

"We expect they will have the energy. They have to change the last few results and, with the individual quality they have, some key players can decide the game at any moment."

Silva admitted he will have one eye on a hectic fixture programme to come, though, despite having the rare luxury of a Boxing Day off to prepare his squad. "The biggest test will come after the West Ham game. In 15 days we are going to play five games and it is going to be very, very busy for us," he added.

Silva is also hopeful midfielder Harry Wilson will be fit for today's London derby after the midfielder picked up a painful knee injury late in Monday's win over Forest.

But the Cottagers' Ryan Sessegnon remains unavailable with a hamstring injury.

NU YEAR RESET
Beating Fulham would send manager Nuno into 2026 on a high

ANOTHER WIN WOULD DO THE TRICK

SPURRED ON
Glasner is aiming for a third win on the spin against Tottenham

CRYSTAL PALACE v TOTTENHAM

Premier League: Tomorrow 4.30pm

Glasner eyeing a perfect end to remarkable year

BY **NEIL McLEMAN**

OLIVER GLASNER has challenged Crystal Palace to complete a hat-trick of wins against Tottenham to finish 2025 on another high.

The Austrian led his side to two wins against Ange Postecoglou's side last season (below), without conceding a goal.

And while Spurs went on to win the Europa league, the south London club claimed the FA Cup and the Community Shield before embarking on their first European campaign this year.

Glasner gave his Eagles 48 hours off to recover from losing the Carabao Cup quarter-final on penalties to Arsenal.

Now, in their last game of the year, Palace are out to continue their good run against Spurs.

"Let's make three in a row," said Palace manager Glasner.

"It was one and two, we're leaving with two clean sheets. Yes, of course, we hope to do it again. Like always, we go to win the game, but they deserve respect and they get all our respect, and then it will be a Premier League game, a nice one."

Thomas Frank's Tottenham have won twice as many Premier League matches away than at home this season.

Glasner said: "It's a great team, there's a very good manager there, and they have invested a lot of money.

"They have different goals than Crystal Palace, they have different opportunities than Crystal Palace, and to win against them means that we have to show a great performance. They have two banned players against us, Cristian Romero and Xavi Simons, but when I see their squad, when I see their attacking, it's just amazing. It will be, like every Premier League game, a nice challenge for us."

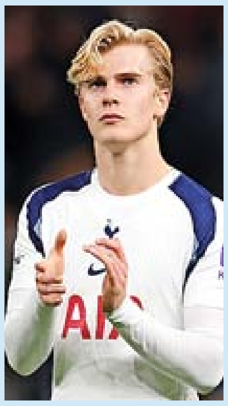
Palace played three games in six days before Christmas and now start a run of six games in 20 days.

And Chris Richards is a fitness doubt after getting carried off against Arsenal.

Asked about his team's performance during the hectic December, Glasner said: "Mixed feelings. It was maybe the worst performance this season against Leeds [a 4-1 defeat], but also we have to accept it with all the games, and I know this group, that's why we all were disappointed, but maybe we have to accept that this can happen.

"But playing three days later at the Emirates, just shows what they can do."

FLEXIBLE LUCAS CAN BE SPURS' BOSZ



BY **ALASDAIR GOLD**

THOMAS FRANK believes Lucas Bergvall can become Tottenham's version of Liverpool star Dominik Szoboszlai.

The midfielder, 19, arrived from Swedish side Djurgarden in 2024 but has already played 66 times.

Bergvall (left) swept the fans' Player of the Year awards at the end of his debut campaign and now Frank believes the versatile teenager will become a star for the long term at Spurs, comparing him to one of Arne Slot's title-winning stars.

"Lucas is very talented," said the Dane. "He's a player we can use in different roles which is hugely beneficial and important, to have that player who can run in behind, he's very good at pressing, good on the ball and he can drive forward with the ball.

"To be that flexible is a huge boost. Look at Szoboszlai, who we all think is one of the best midfielders in the league. He's playing 10, eight, six, right-back, right-winger, nine, centre-back."

Asked whether Bergvall reminded him directly of the Hungarian, the Spurs head coach said: "I don't know Szoboszlai, it looks from the outside looks like he's a good personality. Lucas is a great personality. He's a big part of the future."

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MISFIRING
Isidor misses a chance against Liverpool, but Le Bris is not worried

CATS MUST BARE TEETH

Le Bris looking to find the finishing touch

SUNDERLAND v LEEDS
Premier League: Tomorrow 2pm

SUNDERLAND boss Regis Le Bris wants his side to "fine-tune" their quality in the final third.

The Black Cats have enjoyed an impressive return to the Premier League and could savour being sixth in the table at Christmas.

But they go into tomorrow's clash with Leeds with their players having scored only one goal in four outings this month.

While they were gifted an own goal by Nick Woltemade to win the Wear-Tyne derby against Newcastle, the only Black Cats player to find the net so far in December is Chemsdine Talbi, in the draw against Liverpool.

Le Bris said: "It's a progressive process and if you think about foundations, often you start with the defensive shape, then you work on your build-up, progressive phase, then you finish in the final third. We have a better control of the ball and we are more confident like we did at Brighton, for example, to build-up under pressure against a strong press.

"Now we have to fine-tune this last part and it's sometimes a question of collective behaviours, but it's also a question of confidence. It's not the easiest part, but I'm not worried about this part."

Sunderland have three strikers in their ranks in Brian Brobbey, Eliezer Mayenda and Wilson Isidor – the last of whom is their top scorer with four league goals – and Brobbey was the latest of that trio to find the net, scoring against Bournemouth in November.

Le Bris said: "It's tough to create this confidence for a striker or a forward in general.

"It's more a question of trust, confidence and support rather than creating something specific.

"We are working hard in the different areas to help them progress and sometimes you need a bit of time to understand, to be more efficient so you will waste less energy, for example, in defensive phases, and become more efficient then you can have more energy to attack. So it's a question of time, often, and support."

Leeds will arrive at the Stadium of Light in good spirits, after collecting eight points from a four-game unbeaten run which has opened up a gap above the bottom three.

But head coach Daniel Farke maintains his side require a minimum of 38 points to stay up, so are only halfway to their target.

Farke said: "Overall you would say one point on average per game, so 38 points will be enough to stay in the Premier League.

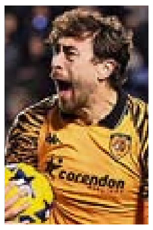
"I know in the last few seasons it has been way less in order to stay up, but in the seasons I've been involved [at Leeds] we needed record points to win the Championship. So for that I expect this season will be difficult."

The sides were promoted together from the Championship and Farke has been impressed with how Sunderland have fared.

He said: "I'm not surprised, but it's definitely remarkable what they have done."

SHEFF WED 2 HULL 2

Championship



JAK OWLIN' MAD AFTER LOW POINT

SERGEJ JAKIROVIC accused Hull of being on holiday after a festive foul up.

The angry Tigers boss blasted referee Stephen Martin – but admitted his players were even worse as they had to twice come from behind against an Owls side featuring just six senior players.

A frustrated Jakirovic said: "We played like it was Christmas today.

"We were very poor in the first half with no control and very low energy. We made bad decisions in possession.

"Their second goal was clearly offside. The referee was poor but my team was also poor, so I can't complain so much."

Svante Ingelsson broke the deadlock after 20 minutes with a smart finish from keeper Pierce Charles' long clearance.

Mohamed Belloumi had an effort cleared off the line before beating Hull keeper Charles at his near post.

Bailey Cadamarteri calmly lobbed Ivor Pandur to restore Wednesday's lead on the hour mark.

But Hull hit straight back as Matt Crooks (above) made the most of a lucky bounce to slot home.

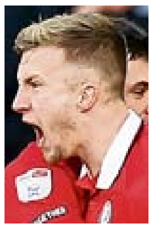
But the Tigers couldn't force a winner and missed out on going third.

Owls boss Henrik Pedersen said: "I have the biggest respect for how our experienced guys led the young ones.

"But also how the guys who came in did really well."

WEST BROM 1 BRISTOL CITY 2

Championship



ROSS PUTS RYAN ON THE BOOS

RYAN MASON is under growing pressure after West Brom were jeered off after Bristol City stormed fortress Hawthorns.

Gerhard Struber's side climbed into the top six thanks to early goals from Anis Mehmeti and Ross McCrorie (above) as the Robins held out for a crucial win despite Ousmane Diakite's late header.

The Baggies could have grabbed a dramatic point, only for Karlan Grant to strike the bar with the last kick of the game to condemn Mason's men to only a second home defeat of the season.

And the table makes for grim reading for West Brom with them down in 16th, just six points away from the drop zone.

Boss Mason said: "I am not immune to anything. I am not going to sit here and ask for patience. It's normal. I understand the emotion and the passion."

City took advantage of a jittery start from the hosts as Mehmeti broke the deadlock in the fourth minute with a low shot from distance.

Mehmeti was fortunate to escape with an elbow-first challenge on Callum Styles before the Robins doubled their lead when McCrorie fired home.

Albion had chances but Max O'Leary saved from Diakite and Isaac Price. The pressure eventually told when Diakite headed home a Mikey Johnston corner.

Robins boss Struber said: "It was a big victory."

MOORE THE MERRIER

BLADE STUNNER
Pure joy for Moore after netting his second but it's too much for Wilder (left)

Kieffer double downs old club in 'F***ing heck of a game'

WREXHAM 5 SHEFF UTD 3

Championship

BY **ANDY HAMPSON**

KIEFFER MOORE struck twice against his old club as Wrexham recovered from 3-1 down to beat Sheffield United in a Boxing Day thriller at Stok Cae Ras.

Patrick Bamford had looked set to take the headlines with a well-taken early double for the Blades.

But the hosts powered back to claim their first win in six Championship outings.

Moore said: "F***ing heck of a game. We know Sheff United are a very good side and we struggled for moments in the game, but to score five goals is outstanding.

"We showed what we are about as a team and we're delighted."

George Thomason provided two assists and won a penalty.

He added: "I would rather win with a clean sheet, but scoring five at home is brilliant. We showed resilience and kept battling.

"Everyone knows Kieffer Moore's attributes, he is a constant threat and puts a shock into opponents before we even get on to the pitch."

With his short-term contract due to expire on New Year's Day, Bamford put himself firmly in the shop window as he scored either side of a Tyler Bindon own goal.

Callum O'Hare added a third for Chris Wilder's side, but Wrexham responded through Moore and levelled through Ryan Longman.

And Wrexham's pressure paid off as Moore struck again 14 minutes from time.

The Wales striker raced onto a Nathan Broadhead ball and fired past Blades keeper Michael Cooper.

Victory was secured five minutes later as Josh Windass converted from the spot after Thomason was ruled to have been brought down by Harrison Burrows.

United almost claimed a late consolation when Tyrese Campbell hit the bar.

Wrexham boss Phil Parkinson said: "It was a strange game! Even at half-time I thought we'd played reasonably well, taking the goals out of it.

"We could have done better, but it was good movement from Bamford for two of the goals they scored.

"I always felt we'd get chances. We got back in the game well and then we just had to defend better in the box, which we did in the second half.

"The moments came our way and it's a terrific win for us. Our front three were great and they worked hard for the team. I'm so pleased for Kieffer to get his two goals.

"And then there was George Thomason playing wing-back for the first time and he looked outstanding for us."

Blades boss Chris Wilder conceded his side were the architects of their own demise.

He said: "You can't concede five goals at any level of football and expect to get a result. It was all self-inflicted, and from our point of view the goals are really poor ones.

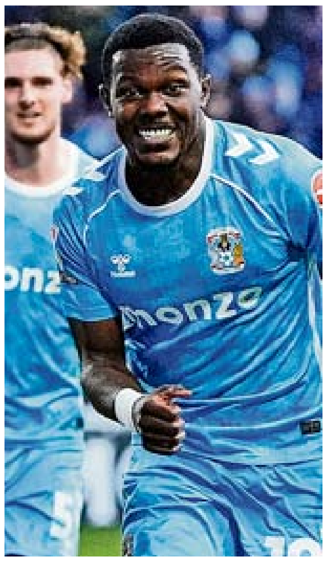
"We just couldn't handle their front three, and Kieffer does what he does. We didn't deal with it.

"We've come away from home and not got what we've wanted. I won't use any excuses.

"We have just got to defend so much better."

CHAMPIONSHIP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Coventry City	23	15	6	2	54	23	51
Middlesbro'	23	12	7	4	33	24	43
Ipswich Town	23	10	8	5	38	23	38
Hull City	23	11	5	7	39	37	38
Preston	23	9	10	4	30	23	37
Bristol City	23	10	6	7	32	25	36
Millwall	23	10	6	7	25	31	36
Watford	23	9	8	6	33	29	35
QPR	23	10	5	8	33	35	35
Stoke City	23	10	4	9	28	21	34
Derby County	23	8	8	7	32	31	32
Southampton	23	8	7	8	37	33	31
Wrexham	23	7	10	6	32	30	31
Leicester City	23	8	7	8	32	33	31
Birmingham	23	8	6	9	31	30	30
West Brom	23	8	4	11	26	31	28
Charlton	22	7	6	9	21	27	27
Blackburn Rov	22	7	5	10	22	26	26
Sheffield Utd	23	8	2	13	31	36	26
Swansea City	23	7	5	11	24	31	26
Oxford Utd	23	5	7	11	24	32	22
Portsmouth	22	5	7	10	19	29	22
Norwich City	23	5	6	12	26	35	21
Sheffield Wed	22	1	7	14	18	45	-8



COVENTRY 1 SWANSEA 0

Championship

MASON-CLARK HAS LAMPARD BOXING CLEVER

FRANK LAMPARD was happy to avoid a Boxing Day "hangover" – but isn't ready to celebr-eight just yet after Coventry took another step towards the Premier League.

The runaway leaders were the only side in the top eight at the start of the day to win as they notched an eighth straight home win – their best run for 70 years.

Lampard's leaders are only the second Championship side to break the 50-point mark at the halfway stage.

They are now 13 points ahead of third-placed Ipswich as Ephron Mason-Clark scored for the third straight game.

Coventry can extend that gap by gaining revenge for a recent 3-0 defeat at Portman Road at the start of December when they host the Tractor Boys on Monday.

And boss Lampard said: "I think it can be a bit of a hangover of, you know, food and everyone, the fans and players alike, and it kind of levels out the game.

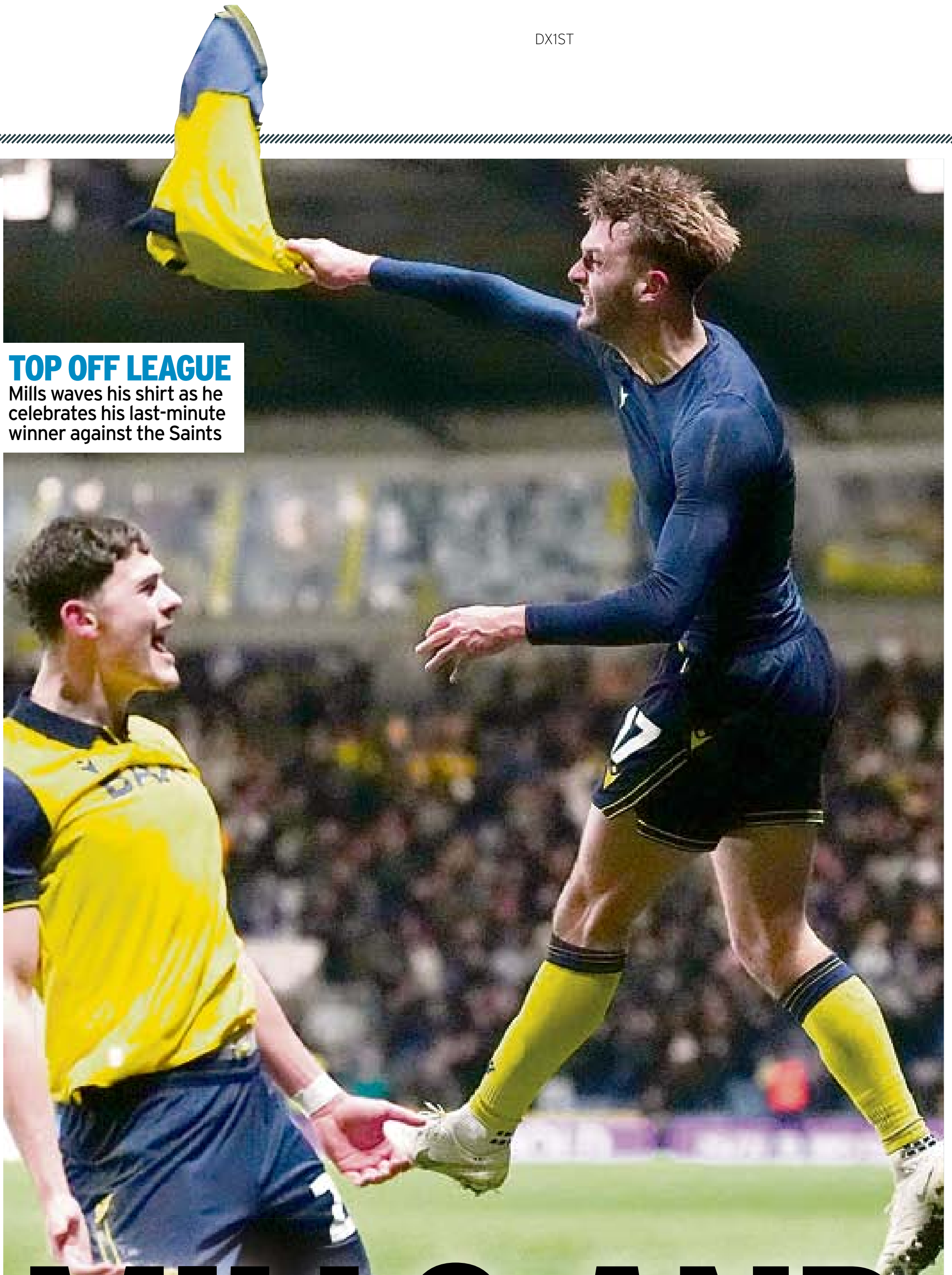
"And I felt that in the first half.

"But we got over that hangover. We were not as good today as we usually are.

"We had to find other parts of our game and keep a clean sheet in a tough test."

Mason-Clark powered home his sixth goal of the season from a Luke Woolfenden flick at Milan van Ewijk's long throw to push the Sky Blues eight points ahead of Middlesbrough in second.

A fifth straight away defeat leaves Swansea four points above the drop zone and boss Vitor Matos said: "It was a positive performance, but there are things we can improve on and one area is how clinical we are with our finishing."



OXFORD 2
SOUTHAMPTON 1

Championship

OXFORD caretaker boss Craig Short hailed match-winner Stan Mills' "pedigree" after his superb late goal saw off Southampton.

Recalled midfielder Tyler Goodrham rifled the U's in front in the 23rd minute with a thumping drive from 20 yards as Saints struggled to clear a corner.

Southampton levelled six minutes later when centre-back Taylor Harwood-Bellis headed Leo Scienza's free-kick from the right past Jamie Cumming and into the bottom left corner of the net.

The match looked destined to finish as a draw but Mills had other ideas, running with the ball 50 yards, taking a return pass from Will Lankshear, then hitting a low angled shot under keeper Gavin Bazunu.

Short said: "Stan's obviously got the pedigree – his dad (Danny) was a great athlete, and his brother (George).

"I get a little bit fed up of players getting to 65 minutes and coming off. I want my best team on the pitch as long as possible, and Stan seemed to get stronger and stronger.

"I didn't want a draw, so I chose a side that would be able to win the game. Our home form has been pretty good against the top sides – I reminded the lads that."

This is the fourth time Short has been caretaker manager at Oxford, but he didn't want to throw his hat into the ring to be the new permanent boss.

He said: "I've done 12 games now, with Covid. I'm euphoric now and full of adrenalin, but three hours ago I wasn't feeling like that.

"All I wanted to be focused on is being a safe pair of hands – this club has been good to me.

"I feel I'm capable of steadying the ship and then see where the process goes."

Southampton head coach Tonda Eckert was unhappy that his team lost control of the game in the second half.

Eckert said: "When there is a change of manager you always have to be aware of a reaction.

"It was the way the game went in the second half that disappointed me most.

"For the quality that we have, we have to make sure the games are more controlled."

TOP OFF LEAGUE
Mills waves his shirt as he celebrates his last-minute winner against the Saints

MILLS AND BOON TALE

Short story has the perfect ending

CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND-UP

CIFUENTES LOOKING OUT-FOXED

BY **JASON MELLOR**

LEICESTER boss Marti Cifuentes is under mounting pressure after the Foxes were jeered off following the 2-1 defeat at home to WATFORD.

Jordan James' sixth goal of the season gave City an early lead, but the Hornets hit back with goals from Othmane Maamma and defender Mattie Pollock (left).

Patrick Agyemang's fourth goal in six games earned DERBY a 1-1 draw at BIRMINGHAM. The American struck before Joe Ward was sent off for two yellows.

Jack Robinson levelled in controversial fashion with the Rams claiming handball. Birmingham's Christoph Klarer also saw red late on.

Kieran McKenna was left frustrated after IPSWICH drew 0-0 at promotion rivals MILLWALL.

MIDDLESBROUGH were held 0-0 at home by BLACKBURN, while STOKE and PRESTON fought out a dour stalemate.

It was the ninth time Mark Robins' side have failed to find the net this season.

PORTSMOUTH had to settle for a point thanks to Jimmy Dunne's second-half equaliser for QPR in a 1-1 draw at Fratton Park.

NORWICH pulled to within a point of safety thanks to Jovon Makama scoring the only goal against CHARLTON.

LEAGUE ONE ROUND-UP

ROBBO IS THE DIFF-ERENCE

ALEX ROBERTSON kept CARDIFF at the top of League One with a 1-0 win over EXETER.

Robertson (above) struck for the first time in almost a year in the 55th minute.

LINCOLN snatched a 2-1 victory at STOCKPORT with a stoppage-time penalty from Rob Street to stay three points behind Cardiff.

Joe Wright scored in the last minute to give BRADFORD a 2-1 win over WIGAN, who had Jensen Weir and Matt Smith sent off in the second half.

BOLTON are fourth after Josh Sheehan scored for a second time in added time to snatch a 2-1 win over ROTHERHAM after Sam Nombe had levelled from a late penalty.

Leo Castledine scored a brace as HUDDERSFIELD thumped bottom side PORT VALE 5-0 and LUTON kept themselves in the mix with a 4-0 home win over WYCOMBE.

BURTON thrashed NORTHAMPTON 5-1 at the Pirelli Stadium.

PLYMOUTH slumped to a 4-1 home defeat against READING after an early red card for midfielder Joe Ralls.

Aaron Lewis' late goal completed MANSFIELD'S comeback from 2-0 down to win 3-2 at BARNSLEY, while Declan Frith hit another stoppage-time winner as PETERBOROUGH beat LEYTON ORIENT 1-0.

Play-off hopefuls STEVENAGE drew 0-0 at AFC WIMBLEDON and Tom Bloxham's goal gave BLACKPOOL a 1-0 win over strugglers DONCASTER.

LEAGUE ONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cardiff	21	14	2	5	38	22	44
Lincoln City	22	12	5	5	32	23	41
Bradford	21	11	7	3	31	21	40
Bolton	21	10	7	4	30	20	37
Stevenage	20	10	6	4	24	15	36
Stockport Cty	21	10	5	6	29	27	35
Huddersfield	22	10	4	8	40	31	34
Luton	22	9	5	8	30	28	32
Barnsley	19	8	4	7	32	30	28
Wycombe	22	7	7	8	28	26	28
Reading	21	7	7	7	28	27	28
Leyton Orient	22	8	4	10	34	35	28
Peterborough	21	9	1	11	25	27	28
AFC Wimbledn	21	8	4	9	24	29	28
Burton Albion	21	7	6	8	23	27	27
Northampton	21	8	3	10	22	26	27
Mansfield	21	7	5	9	27	28	26
Wigan	21	6	8	7	23	25	26
Blackpool	22	7	5	10	25	30	26
Plymouth	22	8	1	13	27	37	25
Rotherham	22	6	6	10	22	29	24
Exeter	21	7	2	12	21	21	23
Doncaster	22	6	4	12	21	36	22
Port Vale	21	3	6	12	13	29	15

LEAGUE TWO ROUND-UP

EVANS HIT BY BEN'S DOUBLE

BROMLEY came from 2-0 down to win 3-2 at 10-man BRISTOL ROVERS with a stoppage-time goal from Ben Thompson and put themselves a point behind League Two leaders Walsall.

New Rovers boss Steve Evans (above) looked set for a first home win after goals from Jack Sparkes and Fabrizio Cavegn.

However, after Shaq Forde was sent off for a second yellow card, Nicke Kabamba reduced the deficit before fellow sub Thompson struck twice in the last 10 minutes.

WALSALL kept themselves clear of the chasing pack after Jamille Matt's goal just before half-time secured a 1-0 win over CREWE at Bescot Stadium.

NOTTS COUNTY lost ground as they slipped to a 2-0 defeat at promotion rivals CHESTERFIELD and SWINDON were beaten 1-0 at MK DONS.

A late penalty from Daniel Udoh gave in-form SALFORD a 1-0 win over strugglers HARROGATE.

Bottom side NEWPORT battled to a goalless draw against BARNET, which leaves them four points adrift of safety, while SHREWSBURY lost 3-1 at CHELTENHAM.

Josh Woods' late header gave ACCRINGTON a 2-1 win over BARROW, CRAWLEY and COLCHESTER drew 1-1, as did GILLINGHAM and CAMBRIDGE.

TRANMERE beat FLEETWOOD 1-0 at Prenton Park and it finished goalless between GRIMSBY and OLDHAM.

LEAGUE TWO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Walsall	22	13	4	5	31	19	43
Bromley	22	12	6	4	37	25	42
Swindon	22	12	4	6	35	26	40
MK Dons	22	11	6	5	43	24	39
Salford City	22	12	3	7	33	30	39
Notts County	22	11	5	6	35	24	38
Chesterfield	22	10	8	4	39	31	38
Cambridge	22	9	8	5	25	19	35
Fleetwood	22	9	6	7	32	29	33
Colchester	22	8	8	6	36	27	32
Crewe	22	9	5	8	34	29	32
Gillingham	22	7	10	5	30	25	31
Barnet	22	7	8	7	28	25	29
Tranmere	22	7	8	7	36	34	29
Oldham	22	6	10	6	21	17	28
Grimsby	22	7	7	8	33	30	28
Accrington	22	7	6	9	25	26	27
Cheltenham	22	8	3	11	21	35	27
Barrow	22	5	6	11	22	32	21
Crawley Town	22	4	7	11	26	37	19
Shrewsbury	22	4	7	11	21	37	19
Bristol Rovers	22	5	3	14	18	42	18
Harrogate Tn	22	4	5	13	18	36	17
Newport Cty	22	3	5	14	21	41	14

YOUR WEEKEND GUIDE TO THE PREM

THE BIG MATCH

CHELSEA v ASTON VILLA

Today 5.30pm, Sky Sports

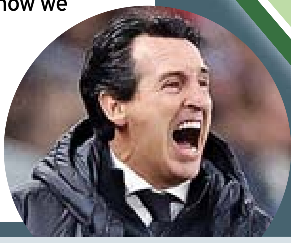
UNAI EMERY wants Aston Villa fully focused for the "huge test" they will face at Chelsea.

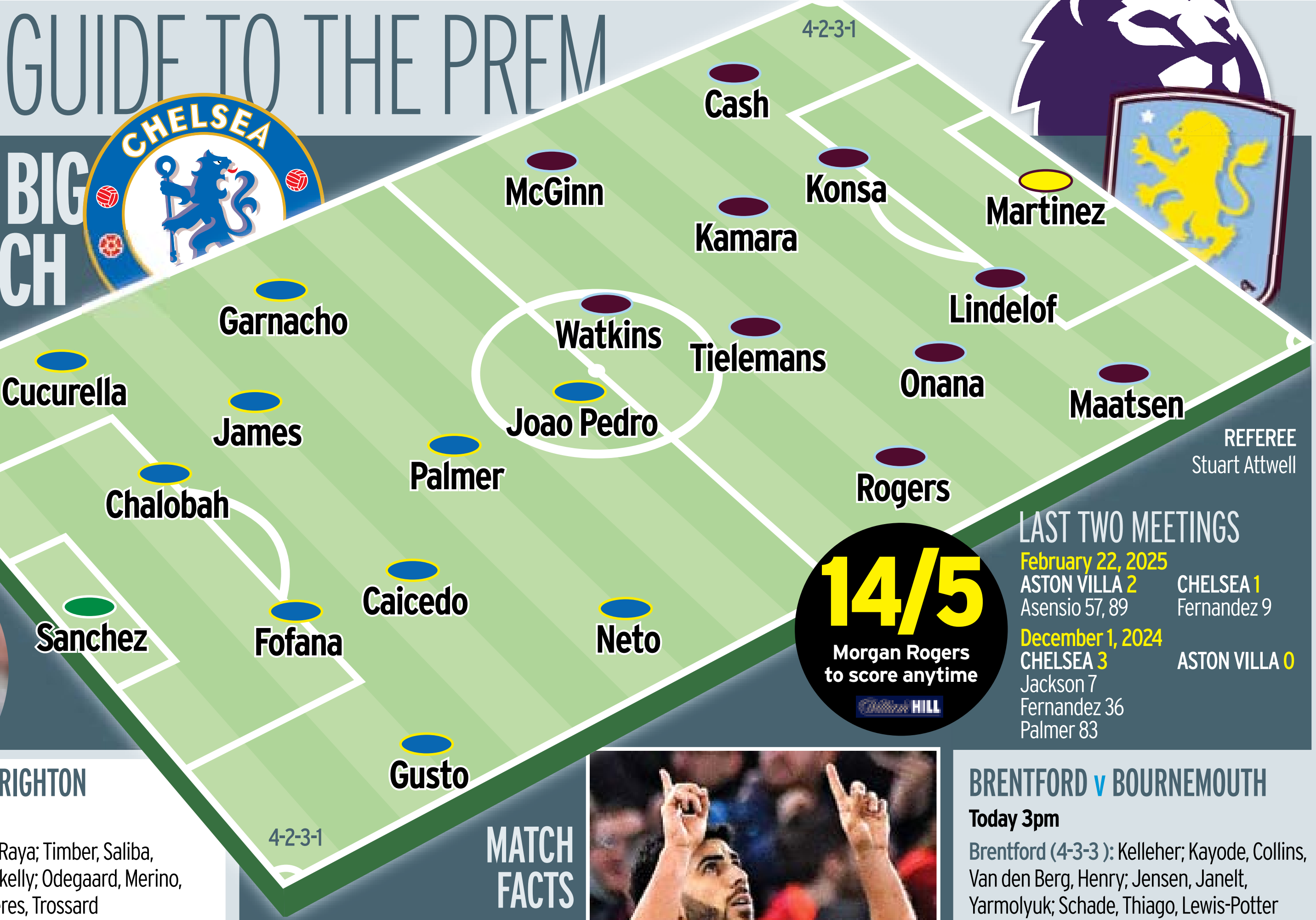
Villa head to Stamford Bridge looking for an 11th successive victory through all competitions.

Emery, though, knows getting another win against Enzo Maresca's team will be a tough ask.

"How we are feeling now is very important with our momentum," said Emery (below). "It is a huge test at Chelsea, a huge test of how we are going to respond.

"We are focusing on this match strongly. Now they (Chelsea) are behind us (in the table), but they are feeling strong."





REFEREE
Stuart Attwell

14/5
Morgan Rogers to score anytime

LAST TWO MEETINGS

February 22, 2025
ASTON VILLA 2 — CHELSEA 1
Asensio 57, 89 — Fernandez 9

December 1, 2024
CHELSEA 3 — ASTON VILLA 0
Jackson 7
Fernandez 36
Palmer 83

MATCH FACTS

2 Chelsea have lost two of their last three Premier League home games against Villa

10 Aston Villa have won each of their last 10 matches in all competitions

2 Chelsea have already suffered two home defeats in the Prem this season (W4 D2 L2),

NOTTINGHAM FOREST v MAN CITY

Today 12.30pm, TNT Sports

Nottm Forest (4-2-3-1): John Victor; Savona, Milenkovic, Murillo, Williams; Douglas Luiz, Anderson; Hutchinson, Gibbs-White, Hudson-Odoi; Igor Jesus

Man City (4-3-3): Donnarumma; Nunes, Dias, Gvardiol, O'Reilly; Nico, Reijnders, Foden; Cherki, Haaland, Savinho.

Referee: Rob Jones

4 Forest have won their last four Premier League matches played between Christmas and New Year

Both teams to score, 7/10

ARSENAL v BRIGHTON

Today 3pm

Arsenal (4-3-3): Raya; Timber, Saliba, Calafiori, Lewis-Skelly; Odegaard, Merino, Rice; Saka, Gyokeres, Trossard

Brighton (4-3-3): Verbruggen; Wieffer, Veltman, Dunk, Kadioglu; Ayari, Gomez, Gruda; Mitoma, Rutter, Minteh

Referee: John Brooks

3 Arsenal have won just three of their eight Premier League home games against Brighton (D2 L3)

Rice to get an assist, 4/1

BRENTFORD v BOURNEMOUTH

Today 3pm

Brentford (4-3-3): Kelleher; Kayode, Collins, Van den Berg, Henry; Jensen, Janelt, Yarmolyuk; Schade, Thiago, Lewis-Potter

Bournemouth (4-2-3-1): Petrovic; Jimenez, Diakite, Senesi, Truffert; Tavernier, Cook; Brooks, Kluivert, Semenyo; Evanilson

Referee: Peter Bankes

9 Brentford are unbeaten in their last nine league games against Bournemouth (W7 D2)

Thiago to score 1st goal, 4/1

BURNLEY v EVERTON

Today 3pm

Burnley (5-4-1): Dubravka; Walker, Laurent, Worrall, Ekdal, Pires; Edwards, Cullen, Ugochukwu, Bruun-Larsen; Broja

Everton (4-2-3-1): Pickford; O'Brien, Mykolenko, Tarkowski, Keane; Garner, Iroegbunam; McNeil, Alcaraz, Grealish; Barry

Referee: Craig Pawson

7 Against no side have Burnley won more Premier games than they have against Everton (7)

Game to finish in a draw, 23/10

LIVERPOOL v WOLVES

Today 3pm

Liverpool (4-2-3-1): Alisson; Frimpong, Konate, Van Dijk, Kerkez; Gravenberch, Jones; Chiesa, Mac Allister, Wirtz; Ekitike

Wolves (3-5-2): Sa; S Bueno, Mosquera, Doherty; Hoever, J Gomes, Andre, Krejci, Wolfe; Arokodare, Hwang

Referee: Simon Hooper

16 Liverpool have won 16 of their last 17 Premier League games against Wolves, last losing in 2023

Ekitike get a hat-trick, 7/1

WEST HAM v FULHAM

Today 3pm

West Ham (4-3-3): Areola; Walker-Peters, Kilman, Todibo, Mayers; Potts, Fernandes, Magassa; Paqueta, Wilson, Bowen

Fulham (4-2-3-1): Leno; Tete, Andersen, Cuenca, Robinson; Lukic, Berge; Wilson, Smith-Rowe, Kevin; Jimenez

Referee: Chris Kavanagh

5 West Ham have lost all five of their Prem games against fellow London sides this season

Jimenez to score a header, 11/1

SUNDERLAND v LEEDS UNITED

Tomorrow 2pm, Sky Sports

Sunderland (4-2-3-1): Roefs; Mukiele, Ballard, Alderete, Hume; Geertruida. Xhaka; Rigg, Le Fee, Adingra; Brobbey

Leeds (5-3-2): Perri; Bogle, Rodon, Bijol, Struijk, Gudmundsson; Aaronson, Ampadu, Stach; Calvert-Lewin, Okafor

Referee: Tony Harrington

8 Sunderland have lost eight of their 10 Premier League games against Leeds (W2)

Sunderland to win 2-1, 10/1

CRYSTAL PALACE v TOTTENHAM

Tomorrow 4.30pm, Sky Sports

Crystal Palace (3-4-2-1): Henderson; Lerma, Lacroix, Guehi; Clyne, Wharton, Hughes, Mitchell; Nketiah, Pino; Mateta

Tottenham (4-3-3): Vicario; Porro, Danso, Van de Ven, Udogie; Bentancur, Gray, Bergvall; Kudus, Richarlison, Kolo Muani

Referee: Jarred Gillett

4 Crystal Palace have won their final league game in each of the last four calendar years

Mateta to get first goal, 4/1

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